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The WINGS of YOUTH

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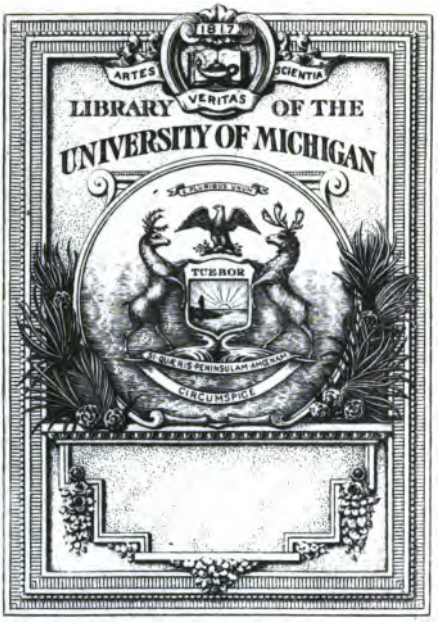
ELIZABETH JORDAN



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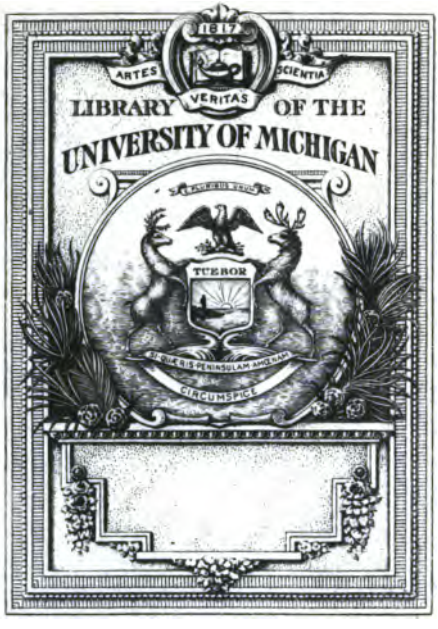

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THE WINGS OF YOUTH

BOOKS BY

ELIZABETH JORDAN

THE WINGS OF YOUTH
MAY IVERSON
MAY IVERSON TACKLES LIFE
MAY IVERSON'S CAREER
LOVERS' KNOTS
MANY KINGDOMS
TALES OF DESTINY
THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

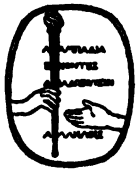
HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
[ESTABLISHED 1817]

BARBARA EXPERIENCED A SENSATION OF BEING AT BAY

The WINGS *of* YOUTH

A NOVEL

BY Garver
ELIZABETH JORDAN
Author of "MAY IVERSON, HER BOOK", "MANY KINGDOMS", "LOVERS' KNOTS" ETC.



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NEW YORK AND LONDON

THE WINGS OF YOUTH

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Printed in the United States of America
Published March, 1918

C-S

O. F. BUTLER
BEQUEST
2-7-40

TO

ANTHONY VEILLER

My Dear Tony:

A year ago, when you were thirteen years old, you confided to me that your highest ambition was to have a novel dedicated to you.

Being myself of an impulsive nature, and the victim of a deep attachment to you, I at once promised to make this ambition a reality. It seemed a small thing to do where the heart was engaged.

In the crowded months since then, there have been moments when the carrying out of the agreement has been almost a strain. But—here is the novel; here is the dedication.

If you like them, I shall be content. If you don't—but we must not even suggest such a possibility. For you see, Tony, if you don't like them—why, then, the whole thing goes for nothing!

Your affectionate friend and adopted "aunt,"

ELIZABETH JORDAN.

New York, *February, 1918.*

2-8-40 DOR

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THE WINGS OF YOUTH

THE WINGS OF YOUTH

I

THE DEVONS MAKE A COMPACT

LAWRENCE and Barbara Devon, lightly referred to in their care-free social circle as "the last of the Devons," sat reading in the library of the old Devon house. A long table, covered with new books and magazines, stood between them. Before them blazed an open fire, and on the rug at their feet a superb Persian cat self-consciously posed, as he lay blinking at the flames. From the walls the portraits of their ancestors smiled upon them or regarded them severely, according to the temperaments of the originals; and all around were pictures, Oriental rugs, tapestries, and other treasures brought home from far lands by restless Devons whose restlessness was over.

As if to emphasize the comfort of the room, a cold September rain blurred its windows and hissed on the sodden ground of the big walled garden lying beyond them. From time to time a man-servant came and went. He raised shades, put logs on the fire, emptied

young Devon's ash-tray with surprising frequency, and in his final visit turned on the lights and solicitously adjusted the double reading-lamp that stood between the brother and sister.

When there was nothing else to do he sat in the hall, on the other side of the library door, watching that door with the expression of an alert but patient cat at a mouse-hole. The Devons, when they rang for him, did not like to be kept waiting.

A casual observer glancing in upon them would have decided that the Devons were certainly fortunate and probably happy. A careful observer would have noticed the shadows on their brows and the discontented lines around their handsome mouths. Either would have looked lingeringly, for the two young faces were very arresting.

Barbara Devon, at twenty-four, carried her striking beauty with quiet assurance, as if she had accepted and then forgotten it. Lawrence, even in his present abstraction, wore a slightly sulky, almost self-conscious expression, the look of one resentfully accustomed to being stared at. He had once told Barbara that his nature had been permanently embittered by their mother's habit of exhibiting him to her friends as a Cupid, until she died when he was five years old. He had sometimes wondered how long she would have kept it up if she had lived. Occasionally his face brightened and took on a smile of great charm—when something amused him, or when he remembered that he was young. He was twenty-three, six feet tall, and he had a superb constitution, which he had endeavored in vain to destroy. At present he was spending his waking hours lounging in the window of life and staring out at the passers-by.

His sister was six inches shorter than Lawrence. She was lighter in coloring and she had a less impulsive nature. She took herself rather seriously, and usually succeeded in making her associates accept her at her own valuation. She was not happy, and she did not know why, which annoyed her.

Suddenly her book struck the wall with a plop and dropped to the floor. Simultaneously, Barbara uttered a groan made up of weariness and disgust. Her brother looked up alertly. He hoped that she was about to start something. He rather liked Bab's tantrums, he admitted to his chums. There was always a chance that she would break out in a new way. Besides, he explained, when a fellow and his sister lived alone, with a regiment of servants around them, they got so confoundedly tired of each other, and so critical, that there simply had to be an occasional explosion.

"The trouble with Bab is," he continued, on one occasion, "she's got the universe on her shoulders. She's found out that a lot of things about it aren't right, so she's trying to make it over. She works on the job all day, and tells the rest of us how to continue it while she's worn out at night. She belongs to a few dozen clubs. She's president of half of 'em and treasurer of the rest. I suppose she's doing a lot, really, for others. But she isn't getting anything out of it herself, if you ask me—and *that's* what's the matter with Barbara!"

He regarded her now with paternal tolerance, and did his best to develop her mood. "Bad little book!" he murmured, glancing at the fallen volume. "What has it done?"

"It's beastly," declared Barbara. "Everything's beast-

ly," she added, comprehensively. She drooped forward in her chair and, with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, stared into the fire. Her brother laid aside the magazine he had been reading. He was glad to lay it aside. For the past twenty minutes he had been looking at one page without seeing it. Anything would be better than that—anything, that is, except listening to Bab talk about her club work. He must try to lead her by tactful stages toward the one topic that to-day interested him, yet which he dared not introduce. He leaned back in his big chair and, clasping his hands behind his curly black hair, gave her his whole attention.

"What's up now?" he asked.

His sister frowned. "Everything," she muttered—"and nothing."

Lawrence indulged in a short laugh. "Upon my word, Barbara," he began, "there are moments when you make me tired." He pulled himself up. It was a time for tact. "This," he added, piously, "is what comes of having too much money. Any one would tell you so."

"Money! What has money to do with it?" With a jerk of the head Barbara dismissed the sordid topic. "It's the monotony of life I can't stand," she explained. "Every day is exactly like the day before. Nothing unexpected ever happens. That's what I'm complaining of. Everybody I know is like everybody else. We're all little jumping-jacks popping in and out of our boxes. If we had any emotions we'd hide them—but we haven't any. Perhaps we're not capable of them. I believe I'd give five thousand dollars this minute," she went on, slowly, "for a new experience—an interesting one, of course," she hastened to add.

Her brother grasped the chance for which he had been waiting. He also relieved a slight embarrassment by leaning forward and vigorously poking a fire that needed no such attention. "Odd how different we are," he remarked, carelessly. "Now I, for example, could have a dozen perfectly new experiences in the next five days, if some one gave me five thousand dollars."

He watched her as he spoke. For a moment she did not seem to take in the meaning of his words. Then she slowly straightened in her chair and looked at him without surprise.

"That means you're head over heels in debt again, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"Poor boy! And it's been worrying you! Why didn't you tell me sooner? You knew I'd help you out."

A slow color mounted to her brother's forehead. He remained silent.

"Why didn't you?" she repeated.

"Because I had promised not to, till the first of the year. Have you forgotten that?"

"Oh!" Barbara reflected. "Why, yes!" she added, slowly, "I remember now. Well, you didn't," she reassured him. "I guessed it."

The color deepened in the boy's face. "I did," he brought out. "I threw out bait."

Barbara sighed. She had emerged from the trench of depression, but she felt like an exhausted soldier wearily preparing to go into action. "Go on," she invited. "Tell me about it."

"There's nothing to tell. It's the same old story."

"Cards?"

"Yes—and a few other things."

"Oh, Laurie!"

He broke out fiercely. "What else is there to do in a place like this confounded little town? Haven't you just been grumbling about it yourself? Can I sit here and twiddle my thumbs?" He went on with the effect of going at a hurdle. "If you'd make me a decent allowance—"

"Dear boy, please, please don't start that subject. You know as much about grandfather's will as I do. You know what it is and why he made it. You know that he gave you chance after chance, and you lost them all. He felt that you could not be trusted with money."

"So he left all his money in the safe, sane hands of a girl who has just offered five thousand dollars for a new experience," Laurie remarked to the fire.

Barbara flushed. "I haven't spent more than my income since he died," she reminded him. "Even though I've had—" She checked herself.

"Big demands from me? Oh, I know! Go on. Say it."

The boy's black eyes stared resentfully into the girl's gray ones. Both young faces were growing pale. A "Devon explosion" was imminent. Barbara pulled herself up on the brink of it.

"We won't wrangle," she said. "That isn't the experience I want. Besides," she added, "Heaven knows it wouldn't be new."

She rose, crossed the room to a desk, and, sitting down before it, opened her check-book. "How much?" she asked, good-humoredly.

"Nothing."

"Don't be silly, Laurie! A thousand?" The pen waited above the yellow slip.

"Well, yes—thanks."

Young Devon experienced an abrupt change of mood. The smoldering light in his black eyes was replaced by a milder glow. He came to his sister's side, took the check she had signed, and, folding it, put it into his pocket with a deprecating grin.

"I know I seem an ungrateful pup," he admitted.

"No, but I do think it was rather nasty of you to bring the thing up now, just when I'm so low in my mind, anyway. You know it always worries me."

Laurie began to speak, stopped, hesitated, and then, with the air of one coming to a sudden decision, drew a chair to the desk and sat down facing her.

"Let's have it out," he said, quietly.

"What?"

"You know—the whole thing. Let's thresh it all out, once and for all, and start on a new basis. I've wanted to do it ever since I was fired from college, but you've been so full of other things that you wouldn't listen. Here's my chance, and I claim it. I want you," he added, deliberately, "to give me the same attention you'd give to any kid in your boys' club—any kid who asked you for half an hour."

Barbara's eyes showed a quick spark. "I don't think I deserve that!" she said, curtly.

"Yes, you do. Oh, you've been generous enough. But I'm asking now for something more than money and affection. I'm asking for understanding. Will you try to see my point of view?"

"Yes."

"Thanks." Laurie drew a full breath. "Then here's the situation: You can't deny that I'm up against it. I've been handicapped from start to finish. Because I made an ass of myself at college, because I came a few croppers then and since then—no one has any faith in me. I'm the unregenerate brother of the beautiful Barbara Devon. Every one in this town has watched us grow up. Every one knows us and all about us. Every one expects me to be a failure and gives me a gentle kick every time I try to get on my feet. Meantime, though I'm only a year younger than you are, and you're a girl of twenty-four, I'm entirely dependent on you. You own everything—the house, the servants, the horses, the cars—everything, including me!"

Barbara studied him thoughtfully. "Go on," she suggested.

"Isn't that the thing in a nutshell?"

"No. Since you want the situation threshed out, let us both be frank. Have you tried to make good? Did you try in the bank?"

He frowned. "Well, I didn't care for that job. But I kept office hours, all right, though I felt like a rat in a trap. And how long did I last? Six weeks," he ended, bitterly.

"Dear old boy, I don't want to hurt your feelings. But wasn't it the same with the real-estate job, the bond-selling job, the broker's job—"

"And all the rest of the jobs? Of course it was. Haven't I just told you why? Every one around expected me to be a quitter, so I quit as per schedule."

"Then I sent you to Chicago and got you an opening there—" she reminded him.

"Yes. An opening I dropped into with a bump that shook my teeth, and shot out of as if a bomb had gone off under me. Because why? Same story. 'Last of the Devon family, but a black sheep. Been cutting a wide swath. Take him in because you knew his father, or because you know his paragon of a sister. Keep him a few minutes to please her, then fire him and tell her he couldn't make good. Only a matter of form, you know.'" He paused a moment, then went on. "Chicago wasn't far enough away from Ohio. They knew us too well, you see."

Something in the intentness of Barbara's expression checked him. She seemed to be listening, yet following up a new thought. He wondered if he had said too much; he had said a little more than he had intended to say. For, after all, this condition was of his own making —not of Barbara's; and Barbara had always been a trump.

"I didn't realize that you felt so bitter about it," she said, slowly.

"It isn't exactly bitterness. It's more like—despair. Could I feel any other way? I've got some self-respect left — a little, not much. Just enough to keep me wretched." His voice thickened, and he rose and went to a window, where he stood for a moment looking out on the storm. "Don't mind me," he muttered, "I've got the pip to-day. But you have no idea of what I've been through, because you've never tried it. And there's something damnable in the general notion that because a fellow has sown one or two fields of wild oats he's got to spend his life cultivating those crops."

"And you really believe we haven't given you your

chance?" Barbara mused aloud, and then harked back to her earlier admission. "I didn't know you felt that way."

"If you'd let me go to New York and start there—" he threw at her across the room.

She went to the window and stood beside him, staring out at the soaked garden which neither of them saw.

"Oh, Laurie, you in New York? You know what would happen!"

He nodded somberly. "The usual thing, I suppose. I'd be a joke in the eyes of others, and a failure in your eyes and my own."

"Perhaps—if the conditions were the same. But if they were all changed—if we tried a new plan—something entirely different—"

She was thinking hard now, and thinking aloud. He waited.

"All I want is a sporting chance," he muttered.

"Laurie," she broke out, suddenly. "*Are* you in earnest? Would you take a sporting chance—a real sporting chance, if it came to you? Even if it meant a lot of hardship—and sacrifice?"

He whirled on her. "You bet I would."

Barbara looked at him without seeing him. "I've got to think," she said, slowly. "Give me a few hours. Perhaps something will come. We'll talk again after dinner. Will that do?"

"Yes."

Laurie knew when to let well enough alone. He returned to the fire and a page of his magazine with the air of being absorbed in the literature, but he did not read. He heard Barbara leave the room, and, out of the

corner of his eye, caught a certain expression she wore as she went. When Bab looked like that it meant that she was going to start something. What was she going to start?

He dropped the magazine and, leaning back in his chair, clasped his hands behind his head in his favorite position and blinked at the fire as lethargically as the cat at his feet. Characteristically, he was not thinking. He did not need to think. The situation was up to Bab.

Dinner that night was a silent meal. After it was over the brother and sister returned to the library and their favorite chairs. Laurie lit a cigar and tried to look indifferent, but now his heart was overworking. A great deal depended on what Bab was going to say.

"Well?" he asked, after a short silence.

Barbara met his glance with shining eyes. "It's all right," she said, eagerly. "I've thought it out. You're going to have your sporting chance."

"That sounds good."

"And, oh, Laurie! I'm going to take it with you!"

"That sounds better!"

"We're going out in the world together to seek our fortunes!"

The boy's brilliant face darkened. "Yes, we are," he scoffed.

"Yes, we *are!* You said I couldn't understand a struggle because I'd never had one. Well, I'm going to have one. Why shouldn't I? We're both foot-loose. We have no family left to consider. We can do anything we like. Can't we?"

Laurie took his cigar out of his mouth. He looked like a bather overwhelmed by an unexpected wave.

"Why, yes, I suppose so," he conceded, guardedly. "What the dickens are you driving at?"

"Just this: If your name and position are handicaps, you've got to drop them. And if you do, *I* will. For one year there simply won't be any Lawrence and Barbara Devon. We'll close the house. We'll tell our friends we're going to Japan. It's about the only place we could seem to go, while this horrible war lasts. But we'll go to New York instead—as Lawrence Jones and Barbara Smith."

"*What?*" Lawrence threw his cigar into the fire and stared at his sister in concern. "Are you out of your senses?" he demanded.

"Not a bit of it. Don't talk—listen."

This, at least, sounded like the normal Barbara. Lawrence was slightly reassured.

"We'll take a trunkful of clothes with us, and fifty dollars each. And for one year—that is, until the first of October next year—we will live on what we can earn in a straight hand-to-hand fight with life. Do you like the idea?"

As her brother seemed unable to speak, Barbara hurried on.

"You will give me your word not to drink or gamble. Total abstinence from both, remember. You'll promise me to live straight in other ways—not to get into any entanglements. We both agree not to give any one the slightest hint of our identity. Remember, I'm taking the same chances you take. Does it still sound good?"

"Why—I—it's so sudden. See here," he broke out, "are you really serious? I can't take it in."

"I was never more serious in my life. And I've left

the punch for the end. Every one admits that the test in the business world is the amount one can earn. So we will make that our test, too. Here's the thing in dollars —and I've worn myself out over the figures," she added, frankly. "If you keep every condition of the contract, up till the first of October of next year, I'll give you ten thousand dollars on that date, whether you succeed or fail as a worker."

"Oh!" said Laurie. He brightened visibly.

"Yes. And here's the sporting element. Besides that, I'll give you five dollars for every dollar you earn more than I earn. If I earn, say, five hundred, and you earn six hundred"—Barbara shamelessly consulted a memorandum—"I never was any good at arithmetic, you know," she threw in—"yes, here it is, you'll get five hundred above the ten thousand. If you earn a thousand and I earn only five hundred, you'll get twenty-five hundred extra. See? I've figured it all out. Do you want to think it over?"

Laurie rose and held out his hand. "No," he said, dazedly. "By Jove, no! But I don't see what you're going to get out of it."

"I'm going to see you make good, I hope. That's the big thing. And, oh, Laurie"—she broke into a gurgle of laughter—"*think* of the new experiences I'm going to have! Whatever happens, some of it will be unexpected. And the unexpected, you know, is what I'm after."

Her brother looked at her thoughtfully. "It may not all be pleasant," he reminded her.

"Of course it won't. I know that."

"It may even be awfully hard at times," added Laurie. There was an unusual solemnity in his eyes as they

rested on his sister. Suddenly they brightened. "But if there's any one, anywhere, I'd back to look after herself and come out on top," he added, cheerfully, "it's you. You'll beat me to a frazzle."

Barbara shook her head. "I'll try to," she said, "but I won't." In her heart she believed that she would.

Laurie drew from his pocket the check she had given him.

"Take back your gold."

"Will that pay all your debts?"

"Yes."

"Then pay them and start clear."

"All right." His spirits were mounting. "And say, Bab, can I take some scarf-pins to hock when the wolf howls?"

"No. Only your watch. Now let's plan everything. This is the twenty-seventh of September. Think of it! In three days we try our wings. That doesn't give us much time for preparation, does it?"

Laurie stared down at her, with a return of the serious expression of a few moments before. Then, hands in pockets, he took a slow journey around the room, pausing at last by her chair.

"See here, Bab," he said, soberly, "I—I'm sure you ought to think this thing over."

His sister rose to face him. "Are you weakening?" she demanded.

The boy flushed. "Great Scott, no! I'm thinking of you. You don't know what you may be letting yourself in for!"

Barbara's eyes softened. For a moment she did not speak. Then, "Do you remember how we used to run

across the fields together to find the foot of a rainbow?" she asked, slowly.

"Yes. We came some croppers, too," Laurie reminded her.

"I know. But we weren't sorry—ever. Were we?"

"N-o-o. But I don't like the comparison. For—you see—we never got there!"

Barbara laughed. "This time," she declared, "we'll get there! Now let's make the lists of what we'll need."

II

BARBARA LEARNS A LESSON

THE Devons reached the Grand Central station late in the afternoon of an unseasonably cold September day, and, more than ever before, were impressed by the number of men, women, babies, nurses, megaphones, porters, and noises it contained. Both knew well the New York of Fifth Avenue and Broadway. Of the hinterlands east and west of these thoroughfares they knew very little, except that human beings lived and died there. To them the deaths seemed natural.

When they had passed to the street through the station's wide doors, the brother and sister stopped and, sagging a little under the unusual burden of their heavy traveling-cases, looked at each other rather blankly.

"Cab?" suggested Laurie.

"Out of my fifty dollars? I guess not!"

"Well, then, I'll pay for it."

"No, you won't. You'll go your care-free way, and leave me to look after myself."

Laurie's jaw dropped. "Now? Right off? Just like this?"

"Wasn't that what we agreed? But I'll let you put me on a down-town car," Barbara handsomely conceded.

"All right." He led the way across the street, and

she followed him with a growing depression she had not expected to feel.

The brother and sister had agreed to board in separate establishments, and to meet only twice during their experiment to compare notes. Though neither would admit it, each was acutely self-conscious over the prospect of making a start under the affectionate but critical observation of the other. The first weeks at least would be hard, and individual problems must be worked out alone.

"Then it's all understood. We're not to meet again till Christmas." To her intense annoyance, Barbara's voice was not quite steady.

"No."

"But—Laurie, suppose something should happen? Suppose we *had* to get into touch?"

"We decided to risk that." The manner of Laurie had become masterful. "Besides, nothing's going to happen," he added, relenting. "We've each got fifty dollars. That will see us through a month or so, even if we don't find work. The day before Christmas I'll go to the general-delivery window of the post-office and get the letter you'll have there, with your address. If you're up against it, you can let me know then," he added, largely. "We'll spend Christmas together—and talk. I bet we'll have a lot to say!"

"And neither of us is ever ill," murmured his sister, following her own thoughts. "So I suppose it's safe—But, three months! Well, good-by, dear."

They kissed, regardless of the passionate interest of a newsboy standing near. Then Barbara climbed into the Fourth Avenue car, and Laurie, after watching it until it was lost in the dimness of the tunnel, turned and,

sternly repressing an inclination to follow it, walked in the direction of Broadway.

Barbara, held on the platform by the conductor's demand for "fares," and by the need of finding a resting-place for her traveling-case while she searched her purse for a five-cent piece, was for a moment too much occupied for thought. But when she was seated in the far corner of the car she realized again that she was not feeling the exhilaration this occasion called for.

She was launched on an adventure—a very big adventure. To all purposes she was alone in the world for a year, with fifty dollars between her and what she mentally called The Abyss. She was not sure just what The Abyss was, but it sounded well. It sounded thrilling—yet, for the moment at least, the thrill was not pleasant. She tried to analyze her sensations. Was she afraid? No! Was she homesick? Possibly. She found herself looking around the car, as if in search of a friendly face. Her fellow-passengers were a dozing messenger-boy, a fat German gentleman absorbed in the war news of an evening "extra," and two unpleasant East Side youths who chewed gum and dropped monosyllables out of the corners of their mouths.

It was not a heartening assemblage, yet she told herself that these men were better off than she was. Each, no doubt, had his definite place in the world, and each had some sort of a shelter to which he would return that night; whereas she— She set her teeth and, with an effort, banished the recurrent picture of her own home which persistently filled her mind.

She left the car at Seventeenth Street and walked briskly toward Irving Place, her shoulders well back and her

head up as an outward expression of her change of mood. There were good lodging-houses on Irving Place, she had heard, and it was near Gramercy Park, which she considered the garden spot of New York. She knew no one in the neighborhood, however, and felt safe in living there, if she could find a room she liked.

But, when she reached them, the houses repelled her. There was a depressing effect of decayed grandeur in their old-fashioned, dusty vestibules, their wide, shabby doors, in the stained marble mantels and black fireplaces of the dingy rooms she entered.

She conscientiously inspected half a dozen rooms, however, going up flight after flight of stairs to do so, with a heart that sank as she climbed. She had asked for a hall bedroom, something small and cheap and clean; but the rooms she was shown, though they were certainly small, were neither cheap nor strikingly clean. To the fastidious Miss Devon they held too many souvenirs of their former occupants, and she descended the stairs more quickly than she had mounted them.

It was already too dark to see clearly, but too early for the official turning on of lodging-house lights. In the hallways she passed occasional shadowy figures that looked spectral at a distance, but proved to be servants with pails and brooms, or lodgers going to their various rooms. Several of the "landladies" breathed unsought confidences into her ear, and one of them was distressingly accurate in a description of the condition of her own legs —a condition due, it appeared, to uselessly escorting young ladies up-stairs to look at rooms they hadn't no notion of taking, anyway.

Barbara had no references, but she soon felt certain

that here, at least, she would not need them; and at no time was she near enough to an agreement to be asked for them. Out of regard for the sensibilities of the rooms' owners, she went through the form of making notes. Each time she did so she opened the small hand-bag she carried, and, taking out her note-book, scrawled an address and returned the book to its place. It was quite dark when she left the last house, still unsuccessful in her search and followed by the richly tangible odor of turnips cooking in the lower regions.

On the street she stopped and looked around her, with a deepening belief that she was having an unpleasant dream.

Irving Place was almost as deserted as a country lane, and quite as silent. A few pedestrians passed her, walking swiftly—"going home to dinner," she reflected, with unconscious pathos. Two blocks away a mass of trees offered a focus for the light of a corner street lamp, and these trees, she knew, must be in Gramercy Park.

She slowly started toward them, dragging her tired feet like a heroine of fiction. Of course, if worst came to worst, she *could* go to a hotel for the night—and make a big hole in her precious fifty dollars! The thought of the hole depressed her, but the dark street and silent quarter depressed her more. She longed for light and warmth and comfort, and that obtrusive picture of home again presented itself, more alluringly than before. To banish it, she visualized a hotel lobby, with a brisk and business-like clerk at the desk, who pushed across the mahogany between them a key that would open a door to a familiar world—a world in which she could be comfortable for a night.

She was dallying with the temptation this vision offered when she reached the park and stopped in the shadow of the high iron fence. There were a few odd silver pieces in her purse. Possibly there were enough of them to pay for a night's lodging. If there were, it would simplify her problem and leave the fifty dollars still intact.

She opened her hand-bag and, thrusting in a quick hand, felt about—at first with confidence, then frantically. At last, with a wildly beating heart, she emptied the contents of the bag into one shaking palm. Dazedly, she itemized the objects she held. Two handkerchiefs, a silver pencil, a red note-book—and that was all. Her purse—the small purse that had held her fifty dollars—was not there. No amount of horrified staring could bring it there.

Barbara Devon was a person of decision. Convinced of the tragedy which had come to her, she lost no time in an effort to recover her property. She returned at once to Irving Place, her head down, examining the sidewalk along every inch of her way, but with no result. In turn she revisited the houses she had so recently left. In each she demanded the landlady, and in each the landlady promptly responded with a countenance of glowing expectation that turned into black suspicion when the visitor asked her questions. She had lost a purse. Had it been found? Could she look through the halls and on the stairs?

She could look if she liked, though the ladies obviously considered this an insulting formality designed to injure and annoy them. When she had vainly searched the last hall, Barbara returned to the park and braced her

back against its iron fence with a sick sensation of being at bay. Life had put its tongue in its cheek and was jeering at her. Her forgotten traveling-case lay on the sidewalk in front of her. She must think. What could she do? What *could* she do?

III

MR. WARREN TO THE RESCUE

A SUDDEN impact and an exclamation in front of her caught the attention of Barbara's numbed brain. Some one rapidly walking along the street had stumbled over the traveling-case.

"Da— What the dev— I beg your pardon!"

Still dazed, she looked up. Above her towered a tall young man, wearing a smile expressing apology and pain. He appeared to be testing one foot, rather gingerly, and as if uncertain whether it was still there.

"Hope I didn't frighten you," he said. He bent and retrieved the traveling-case, which his unexpected kick had sent over on its side. "I was coming like a steam-engine," he explained. "No right to, of course. Thinking. Didn't see you in the shadow of the fence."

His hat was off his blond head, and he seemed to be waiting for her to speak. His smile was more spontaneous, and his manner reassuring. His blue eyes were very friendly. Barbara, who had a pagan admiration for good looks, realized, even in the chaos of the moment, that this young man possessed them. She tried to smile back at him. The effort was a failure.

"It was my fault," she found herself able to say. "I hope you didn't hurt your foot."

He looked down, as if her question had revived his interest in it.

"Thought I'd broken it off at first," he admitted. "Did you ever run against a door in the dark? It's the same sensation. But it's all right now." He replaced his hat and turned to go, then hesitated. There certainly was no reason to linger, yet something in the girl's expression—a kind of desperation—held him. "That case must be frightfully heavy," he observed, tentatively. "You're not carrying it far, I hope."

"N-o. No, thank you."

Barbara's voice shook, notwithstanding her effort to keep it cool and steady. In another moment this blond young man, the only person she knew in her new world, would leave her; and if that happened she was afraid she would try to hold him back by main force. But he still lingered—wearing exactly the right expression of apology, sympathy, and friendly interest. He smiled a little. His front teeth, very white, were not quite straight. They added an odd attractiveness to his smile.

"I beg pardon," he said again. "But—you seem to be a stranger. Please don't misunderstand me when I ask if I can be of any service—if I can direct you anywhere."

Barbara took the deep breath of a swimmer about to dive.

"Yes," she said. "Tell me, please, whether there's any place in New York one can go to when—"

She stopped. He was watching her intently.

"Yes?" he prompted.

"When one has no money," she finished with a rush.

Unconsciously his eyebrows rose a trifle, but his eyes

remained steadily on hers. Before he could speak she hurried on.

"I have lost my purse somewhere around here, in the last half-hour. I suppose it sounds queer—suspicious; but it's true. I have been in half a dozen houses looking for rooms. Perhaps I dropped it in one of them. I have been back to look, but the people all say I didn't."

"Naturally, they would."

His voice was reassuringly matter-of-fact.

"Or possibly I dropped it on the way here, or in the street-car. I don't know. All I know is—" She threw up her head and met his eyes with a look that carried conviction. "I haven't a cent, and there's no one I can turn to."

"Oh yes, there is." He picked up the traveling-case as he spoke. "You can turn to me, and then we'll both turn to the St. Ivans. Come."

"What's the St. Ivans?" She was already following him as she asked the question, but at his reply she stopped.

"It's a hotel near here—a very good one. Small, quiet, high class—"

"And expensive," she ended. She shook her head. "Wait, please."

He stopped.

"You see, I haven't any money," she reminded him.

"But I have. I'm going to take you to the door and leave you there, with enough money to keep you for a few days, until you can communicate with your friends."

Again she shook her head.

"Please set down that heavy case," she urged, "and listen for a moment."

When he had obeyed she went on.

"I can't communicate with my friends, because I—I haven't any friends. I have come to New York to find work. I must not begin by borrowing money from a stranger—"

"If you prefer," he said, rather coldly, "I will vouch for you and guarantee your account."

"Or by running up a bill at an expensive hotel," she ended. "Can't you see? I have come to New York to look for work. I *must* be economical."

"In the mean time you must eat and sleep," he reminded her.

"Yes, in some place where I can afford it. Not in a hotel. Isn't there a boarding-house near here, on the park, perhaps—where they would take me in and trust me for a week, till I've found something to do?"

He uttered an ejaculation. "All right. I know just the thing. Odd I didn't think of it sooner."

He seized the case and led the way around the park, stopping before a comfortable red-brick house whose wide front doors opened directly upon the sidewalk. Gratefully setting down his burden, he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, opened the door with one of them, and motioned for her to precede him. As she hesitated, he nodded reassuringly.

"It's all right," he repeated. "It's just the thing. Go in, and I'll explain."

He led her to a small reception-room at the right of a comfortable, brightly lighted but deserted hall, and, giving her a chair, sat down facing her. At the end of the hall she saw an elevator shaft, and the slow movement of the cables within it proved that the elevator was noiselessly ascending. Other than this there was no sign of

life. But she liked the atmosphere of the place, the quiet good taste of its furnishings. Most of all, she liked the appearance of this good Samaritan she was now seeing clearly for the first time; while he, as he looked at her, almost caught his breath. For an instant he stared, forgetting what he had intended to say. She was beautiful —she was more than beautiful. And she was just about the last person in the world one would expect to find wandering about New York friendless and penniless. He was so overwhelmed by her that he continued to stare until he saw her face flame.

"Forgive me," he said, confusedly. "I—I—" He got himself in hand. "This is the Parkview," he explained, briskly. "It's an old house made over into small apartments—two rooms and a bath. Unfortunately, there's no dining-room in the building. The tenants have to go out to meals, but I believe most of them have ice-boxes and gas-stoves, and the women make their coffee in the morning. It's just the place for you."

"But how can I—"

"Wait a minute. A spinster aunt of mine—Henrietta Warren—has an apartment here—on the top floor. Maybe you've heard of her. She's in France now, doing Red Cross work, and I've promised to look at the rooms occasionally, to be sure they're still here and kept in order. She hasn't much faith in the housekeeper's neatness, unless she's watched. She left the key with me—and there you are." He smiled at her triumphantly.

"But I can't—"

"Of course you can." There was the slightest suggestion of impatience now in his crisp tones. "What else can you do? You can see at a glance that the place is

entirely respectable. Gramercy Park doesn't lend its staid sanction to any other kind. Here you are, safe and comfortable, with plenty of time to look for work, and no expense but your meals while you're looking. It's an ideal arrangement, and Henrietta Warren is the most generous creature alive. She'd *want* you to. The housekeeper leaves at six, but come along and I'll turn you over to the elevator-man."

The edge on his voice, the hint of impatience, steadied her as nothing else could have done. When he met her he had been hurrying to keep a dinner engagement with a friend on the park, but the impatience was not wholly due to the fact that he had already kept that lady waiting almost half an hour. It was with himself. Why was he bowled over by this girl as if he had never seen beauty before?

Barbara misunderstood his expression, as she had misunderstood his tone. He was right. There was no other place open to her, and she could not keep this stranger chained longer to her complicated affairs. Without a word she rose and he led the way down the hall.

The elevator had descended to the ground floor during their talk. A middle-aged man with prematurely white hair was lounging in its open doorway. He wore a faded livery and the depressed expression that goes with his calling, but something like a gleam of interest appeared in his dull eyes as they fell on the approaching pair. Barbara's companion greeted him with easy assurance.

"Good evening, Hendrick. This is a lady who has sublet Miss Warren's apartment while she's away. Take her up to the rooms, please, and see that she's made comfortable."

Hendrick opened his mouth and for an instant omitted to shut it again. A bill passed from palm to palm.

"Yes, sir. Of course, sir. Very good, sir."

"Then, good night. Here's the key." Barbara's companion held out his hand.

"See that the lady has an open fire in her sitting-room," he told Hendrick.

"Yes, sir."

Under the shadow of his departure, Barbara offered both hands, and the elevator-man, to show his tactful detachment from the situation, turned away and coughed in a lowly manner.

"How good you have been to me!" she said. "I shall never forget it. What should I have done without you?"

"You'd have been all right. I'll telephone in the morning. There's a telephone on Aunt Henrietta's desk. Meantime," he turned to Hendrick, "you understand that, if necessary, you will die in this lady's service!"

"Yes, sir," said Hendrick, stolidly.

"You will telephone?" Barbara's illumined face flashed on him. She was not to lose her one friend, after all.

"Of course I will. I've got a lot of advice in me, and it doesn't often have so good a chance for expression. I've got to tell you all about getting a job here."

As the first tears filled her eyes, he laughed down at her, because he dared not trust himself to speak seriously.

"We're going to be mighty busy for the next few days. Good night."

She watched him go down the hall and through the door. Then, entering the elevator, she found herself ascending to the top floor with the running accompani-

ment of Hendrick's conversation. He bristled with stimulating curiosity.

"Didn't catch your name," he was saying. "Smith? Miss Smith? Well, I guess I can remember that. Mr. Warren's an absent-minded man."

"Mr. Warren?—" she checked herself. So that was his name!

"'Twas just like him not to say who you was," rambled her companion. He waited—but in vain. "He's all right, all right," he finally continued. "There ain't none better than Mr. Warren. His aunt, Miss Warren, the one you've took the rooms from, she had pneumonia last year, and Mr. Warren was here most of the time till the danger was over. So we got to know him pretty well. There ain't many better than Mr. Warren," he repeated, solemnly.

Barbara almost giggled. He had made the tribute sound like an epitaph.

He opened the door as he spoke, that she might pass out into the upper hall. There he led the way to a door at the front end of the long corridor, and, opening it, let her into a square of darkness, where she heard him fumbling for an electric fixture.

The light flashed up in a tiny private hall, from which she advanced into an unexpectedly large and charming living-room. It was a woman's room—furnished simply but beautifully. The walls were lined with closely filled book-shelves; there were reading-lamps and a flat, polished writing-table, good rugs, deep chairs, and a fireplace in which logs lay ready to be lit. The two windows looking out over the park had broad seats. While she looked around, the elevator-man set a match to the waiting kindling, and a blaze appeared and spread.

Barbara dropped into a chair and, with a deepening sense of comfort, watched the fire grow.

"Anything else, miss?" Hendrick was at the door.

"Nothing, thank you."

"If you want anything, just come out and ring the elevator-bell."

"Thank you. Good night."

He was gone, and Barbara, without removing her hat, rested her head against the back of the chair and closed her eyes. Thought had ceased. She was sheltered, she was warm, and for a moment at least she basked in the comfort of the room as unthinkingly as her Persian cat would have done.

She was roused from her drowsy trance by the ringing of the telephone-bell on the writing-table at the other end of the room. Springing up, she answered it.

"Is that you?"

She knew the voice at once.

"Yes."

"You see, I don't even know your name," the voice went on, with a laugh in it.

"It's not beautiful"—she smiled to herself as she spoke—"but you can't forget it. It's Smith—Barbara Smith."

There was a moment of silence at the other end of the telephone. Then, "My name is Jones," said the voice, politely.

Barbara laughed. "The elevator-man told me your secret," she admitted.

"Oh! What I want to say," added Warren, "is that when it comes to rescuing ladies in distress I'm an addle-headed, inefficient chump."

"I—don't understand."

"You will, and you'll have your opinion of me. Do forgive me—but I utterly forgot to feed you!"

Barbara released the breath she had been holding. "So you did," she conceded. "But never mind; I'm not hungry."

"You are. You must be. Will you come out now, and dine with me? I had a dinner engagement, but I've cut it. Will you?"

"No, thank you."

"Why not?"

"For a thousand reasons. One is that I'm too tired."

"It's the only one that counts." There was another moment of silence. Then, in the flat tones of disappointment: "Very well. I'll send in your supper."

"If you will send me two sandwiches, I shall be very grateful. If you send anything else, I'll be—"

"What?"

"Hurt—and annoyed."

"All right. Good night again—and pleasant dreams."

"Good night, kind sir, and Heaven bless you."

When Barbara had replaced the receiver on its hook she walked about examining her new quarters more closely. There was only one more room—a small but comfortable bedroom, with a tiled bathroom opening from it. Still centering her thoughts on the present, she changed her gown for the negligée and slippers in the traveling-case, and, putting her toes on the fender, beamed drowsily at the fire. Knuckles assailed the door.

"Your supper, miss," explained Hendrick, entering with a tray. "And the restaurant folks will send for the dishes in the morning."

He drew a table close to her chair, deposited the tray

upon it, and departed, while Barbara turned to her supper. It was a simple one—a very small roast chicken, a lettuce salad with French dressing in a little bowl, rolls, butter, and a tiny glass of Bar-le-duc. On these dishes Miss Devon cast a smile of warm approval. Then, drawing the table closer, she devoured the meal to the last crumb. She was a superbly healthy young thing, and this experience of being penniless in a great city was hungry work.

As she ate she looked out upon the dusky beauty of the park, listened to the crackle of her fire, and thanked her gods that things were as they were. Given all the conditions, what might not have happened? Yet here she was, warm, fed, in luxury—and all, *why?* The question brought her up sharply, and the answer followed close upon its heels.

Because she was a woman, and a young and pretty woman. That was all there was to it. If she had been old—or if she had been a boy— How, for example, would Laurie have fared if he had lost his money? Yet she had told him that they two were starting out on equal terms!

These reflections, and a few profound thoughts on the mysteries of life, accompanied Barbara to bed, and occupied her mind as she lay listening to the night sounds of the quiet house—the closing of distant doors, the elevator-bell, the occasional passing of feet along the hall. Her great adventure had begun, but *was* it beginning fairly? *Was* it beginning on equal terms? She was still considering this problem when she fell asleep.

IV

PAWNED—A LADY'S WATCH

IN his bachelor apartment on lower Fifth Avenue Robert Warren leaped from his bed with a heart as jocund as the morning. As he took his cold plunge he sang and whistled popular songs, and while he dressed he grew more ambitious and rendered parts of an operatic aria with such enthusiasm that his nearest neighbor, who was a nervous man, was moved to beat upon the connecting wall.

As Warren passed and repassed his windows in active excursions to and from his chiffonnier, he observed with approval that the sun was shining. The faint suggestion of melancholy in the autumnal haze that hung over Washington Square seemed fitting. Washington Square had no immediate prospect of seeing Miss Smith.

If any one had asked him to put into words the secret of his high spirits, he would have replied, believing he spoke truthfully, that he was going out of town for the week-end at his country club, and that he expected to "wipe up the golf-links" with the man who had defeated him last week. But in reality his gaiety drew nothing from this source.

The moment he had opened his eyes a face had come before them—a face he had seen for the first time last

night, and intended to see again this morning at the earliest moment in which he could decently present himself at the apartment in Gramercy Park. It was a wonderful face—but though it was still so vividly before him, he could hardly have told the color of the girl's eyes, or the secret of the charm which had held him from the early moments of their first meeting.

It was rather absurd that he could not be sure about the color of her eyes. With a forgotten tie dangling in one hand, he stood still for a second considering the question. They were brown, he decided—brown, or a very dark gray that at times looked brown. And her mouth, and her smile—that adorable smile, so pathetic when he saw it first, so brilliant and flashing when she said good-night to him in the safe shelter he had found for her! Oh, she filled his thoughts, this girl. And though Warren had met charming girls before, and occasionally had been fascinated by them, and usually had lost the effect on closer acquaintance, everything in this experience was different. This time, he was sure, no disillusionment awaited him.

The mystery of her also intrigued him. Who was she? Where had she come from? She had appeared at his side, a practically unlabeled human package—for the name of Smith meant nothing; but of course any one could see that she was an unusual type. There had been a certain decision and authority about her, even during the moments of her obvious panic. She was a person accustomed to consideration and to taking service for granted. Also—this detail had not escaped his masculine eyes—she was beautifully though very quietly dressed.

Warren had a sister. He knew something of the cost

of such elegant simplicity. His instinctive tribute to it now was an interest in his own appearance. He surveyed and coldly rejected three suits of clothes before he found the right one, and he cast from him the tie he had been holding, and spent five minutes on the selection of another. But there was plenty of time for these attentions to detail. He had risen at seven. It was now eight. He could hardly call to take Her to breakfast before nine. Or could he? Should he telephone and ask her?

His intelligence rejected this subconscious suggestion. The telephone would make it too easy for her to decline. It would be better, he decided, to drop in quite casually, at nine o'clock, and to send up word that he was waiting to take her to breakfast. Then she could hardly send him away.

He dressed, therefore, with much deliberation, putting in time rehearsing imaginary conversations with her. Had she slept well? Bromidic, of course, but one had to ask. And had she felt at home in Aunt Henrietta's rooms? The old girl had some rather good things there —things she had picked up in out-of-the-way places, and which Miss Smith would appreciate. Their presence explained in part Warren's supervision of the untenanted rooms.

Then, after breakfast, what? What could he suggest without risk of being misunderstood? Probably a walk would be the best thing—a long walk in Central Park, during which they could discuss plans. And perhaps she would lunch with him at the Casino.

He had completed his toilet by this time, and as he strolled up Fifth Avenue to Twenty-first Street he was struck by the unusual beauty of the world. He ob-

served details that hitherto had escaped him. That church, with its ivy; the fine lines of a door across the street; a bed of chrysanthemums in an old garden that smiled behind an iron fence. The depressed and weary aspect of crawling cab-horses, the bleary look of their drivers, turning unwashed faces to the morning sun, the tragedy of a slinking and ragged female figure that crept along the street close to the shelter of its buildings—these pictures did not exist for Warren.

He entered the Parkview with head high and shoulders swinging. Hendrick was at the door of his empty elevator.

"Good morning, Hendrick," said Warren. "Take my card up to Miss Smith, please, and tell her I'm waiting to take her out to breakfast."

A peculiar phenomenon manifested itself in Hendrick. He appeared to enlarge. When he spoke his voice had the unction of one who conveys sad tidings to a vitally interested hearer.

"She's gone, sir," he droned, in mournful cadence. Then, retreating under the look in the caller's eyes, he added, quickly and defensively, "She ain't here."

"Gone?" Warren was gaping at him with dropped jaw. The stunned incredulity of his look was a sufficient tribute to the effect of the other's news.

"Yes, sir," Hendrick repeated, and went on with growing confidence. "She left an hour ago. I thought she was just goin' to breakfast, till I see her suit-case."

"But—but—did she say where—"

"She didn't say nothing—much. She just"—Hendrick was fumbling in his pocket—"she just left this note and said to give it to you when you come."

He paused, pained. The impetuous gentleman facing him had snatched the note and was reading it before Hendrick had finished speaking. It was a brief note—so brief that Warren took it in almost in an eye-flash.

DEAR MR. WARREN,—Please don't think I am ungrateful, for indeed I shall never forget your kindness and help. But of course I cannot stay here. Some day, after I have found work, I will write and tell you that all is well with me. Thank you again, and believe me,

Sincerely yours,

BARBARA SMITH.

That was all—but it was enough. Under the blow of it Warren felt bewildered and stood still, staring at Hendrick. Was any drop of knowledge left in that shallow reservoir?

Moved by the unconscious pathos of his expression, Hendrick shook his head.

"She just left," he reiterated simply.

She had just left. That was all.

"Which way did she go?"

"Toward Third Avenue—walkin' slow."

"Toward Third Avenue, walkin' slow—" And no wonder. Good God, she hadn't a cent! She was utterly alone in New York, without a soul to turn to. She herself had told him so. What would happen to her? Warren set his teeth. He must find her, and at once—but how? He must get away from the dull but boring eyes of Hendrick and think the thing out.

"I'll go up to the apartment," he muttered, entering the elevator.

Hendrick took him up in sympathetic silence, and

Warren opened the door with the latch-key Miss Smith had inclosed in her note. On the threshold his companion showed a disposition to give this sufferer the solace of his continued presence, but Warren checked the impulse by the simple method of closing the door and leaving Hendrick on the outside.

Alone in the deserted living-room the young man dropped into a chair and lent himself to gloom.

The whole episode was flabbergasting, he mused; but the most astounding thing about it was this disappearance—and its effect on himself. He was no sentimental school-boy, to be bowled over by a half-hour's romantic encounter with a pretty girl. But this girl was different. Both heart and brain told him so.

The impression she had made was that of an extraordinarily arresting personality. The empty room, where she had been so recently, still seemed full of her. She had walked on these rugs; she had looked upon these pictures; possibly she had opened some of those books and sat at that desk. There, before the ashes of the fire, stood a big chair drawn close to the fender. Warren crossed the room and sat down in it, grimly smiling at himself as he did so. No school-boy could beat that, he reflected, dispassionately, as he rested his head against the chair's high back, where, surely, her head must have rested last night. Yes, and no grown man could experience a more acute pang of loss than the one he was undergoing now.

Slowly, while half an hour passed, he pondered the situation. He had found her—the one girl whom, consciously or unconsciously, every man is seeking. He realized now that he had known her at once; otherwise

he would have followed the natural procedure of making his apology and going on his way. Why had he lingered? Why hadn't he been suspicious? Why had he taken this stranger under his protection as promptly and as naturally as if she had been his sister or his friend? Why had he put her in temporary charge of Aunt Henrietta's most cherished treasures?

It was because, even in those first moments, he had known her. The thing happens often in books, rarely in real life. It had happened to him. That was all there was to it.

And surely, his thoughts ran on, she must have shared something of his sense of confidence and understanding. She had trusted him—last night, anyway. The question lurking in the back of his head suddenly sprang into the foreground:

Was it because she no longer trusted him that she had left this morning? The thought was so intolerable that he promptly banished it. No. It was pride that had influenced her—the pride that would not allow her, even for a few hours, to be dependent on a stranger. He recalled the poise of her head, the short curve of her upper lip—yes, there was pride there in plenty. It had driven her out into the world—friendless and penniless, according to her own admission.

His thoughts, having swung round a circle, returned to their starting-point. What would happen to her?

Inaction being unbearable, Warren rose and walked restlessly around the room. She had left everything in perfect order. She must have written his note—the precious note in his pocket—at Henrietta's desk, on Henrietta's letter-paper; yet—Warren crossed to the

desk and looked down on it—the top of the big inkstand was closed, the pen was back on its rack, the blotter was in its accustomed place. He walked over to the bedroom, opened the door, and glanced in. The bed was left open to the fresh air that was passing through the wide windows. Through the door of the bathroom came the faint familiar perfume of a French toilet-water his sister used. He shut the door quietly, went back to the chair before the fireplace, and ordered his mind to work. This was a time for abundant cerebration.

"What would she do? Given all the conditions—where would she go?"

There was only one answer to the first question. She had to have money, so she would pawn something—and she had turned to Third Avenue and the unobtrusive pawnshops of that region. She had no car fare, so she would walk; and most of the pawnshops were downtown, therefore she would probably turn south on Third Avenue.

Following the same reasoning, it seemed clear that she would stop at one of the first pawnshops she reached; they were all unknown ground to her, so she would have no choice. Of course she would have something valuable to pawn; a girl dressed like that surely possessed a handsome ring or two. His spirits rose with the thought. No doubt she would get enough money to support her for a fortnight or longer, and, having it, her next step, of course, would be to find lodgings. As she had been looking on Irving Place, she might go there again—but, no; he remembered that she had exhausted Irving Place, which, moreover, now held no memories to lure her. Also, she was not likely to go back to Gramercy Park.

Warren experienced the chagrin of a bloodhound who has lost the scent. There was no clue whatever to where she would go; but he might possibly learn something by tracing her to the pawnshop she had visited. Would he be justified in doing that? He was not sure that he would; he only knew he had to do it.

He left the apartment with a lighter heart than he had carried into it, and under the warming influence of his relief tipped Hendrick for being alive, and left in his care a tribute to the housekeeper. Walking briskly down Third Avenue he maintained a close watch for gold balls over doorways, and incidentally he observed with interest that the whole aspect of the day had changed.

True, the sun was still shining; chrysanthemums glowed in the modest windows of small flower-shops; and a hand-organ, ground by a reflective Italian, senilely rendered the aria Warren had merrily whistled an hour ago. But the elevated trains rattled overhead, mongrel dogs obstructed his path, the men and women he passed looked forbidding; gloom enveloped the world.

In the first pawnshop he entered Warren gained no information. He had no better fortune in the second, the third, the fourth, and the fifth. He was beginning to feel discouraged when the possible explanation of his failure occurred to him. Had she, perhaps, inferred that he would follow her, and had she deliberately gone farther down-town, to throw him off the trail? She was clever enough to think of that; she was clever enough to think of anything.

It was by the merest chance that, at this point in his reflections, he turned his head and glanced along the uninviting vista of a cross-street. Then he stopped, his

gaze suddenly intent. Half-way down the block three dim brass balls swung idly in the morning breeze, and on the instant he saw them Warren felt an absolute certainty that he had found The Place. He thought of it in capitals; for the moment it was the most important thing in Life's window display.

He quickened his steps, and, entering the somber little shop, favored the stout proprietor with a smile to which that bald-headed and aloof individual coldly declined to respond. Though without previous experience in such matters, Warren decided that it was wise to go straight to the point.

"Has a young lady been in here this morning to pawn anything?" he asked.

The pawnbroker glanced at him remotely and without ceasing his endeavor to rearrange the uninviting contents of a grimy glass case that separated him from his visitor.

"Several ladies been in here," he muttered.

"The lady I mean," continued Warren, undaunted, "is young and pretty. She wore a dark-brown dress, and a brown hat and coat trimmed with sealskin."

The man lifted his eyes to Warren in a quick scrutiny. Something flickered in them, then died out as he glanced away.

"I don't know," he threw across the case. "I don't pay no 'tention. How customers look," he added, severely, "ain't my business."

Warren, leaning toward him with his elbows on the case—a thing he was earnestly requested not to do in a printed slip pasted on the inside of it—regarded the man with his ingratiating smile.

"I know," he said, "but it's my business to find this girl. It's as important to her as to me that I should find her."

The pawnbroker uttered a sound in which, with much success, he expressed scorn and incredulity.

"Yes, I know," he said. "Such stories I hear often. No girl like you said come in here to-day." He leaned across the case and shook a forefinger in the visitor's face to emphasize his next words. "But if she did, understand me, it ain't your business. It's my business. See?"

The visitor saw. The gentleman was annoyed about something. Possibly he had been having recent and unpleasant experiences with detectives. Warren, while he knew nothing of the pawnbroker type, did not believe it was usually so coy.

He was reluctantly turning to go when his eye was caught by something that lay in the case. It was a watch, and it was as much out of place in those surroundings as an orchid would be in a bed of dandelions. He had not seen Miss Smith's watch; he was not even sure that she had a watch; but some instinct told him that this was her property. It looked like her. He took a bill out of his pocket and laid it on the case. It was a large bill.

"See here," he said, quietly, "the girl has been here. That's her watch. She hadn't a cent, and she wouldn't borrow from me. I've no idea where she's gone. All I want is to be sure she raised some money. Tell me exactly how she looked and what she said, and keep this bill for your trouble."

The pawnbroker pursed his lips, raised his eyebrows,

and regarded the bill with affection. Then, with something like a sigh, he shrugged his shoulders and pushed it back to Warren. He had experienced a change of heart.

"Oh, it ain't no secret," he said, carelessly. "Only I don't have to tell every fresh guy my business. That girl—I guess it's the one you mean—she come here this morning about nine o'clock—soon after I opened up. She put down that watch on the counter and she said, 'Will you advance some money on this?'"

With unconscious art he imitated Barbara's natural elegance of speech and the proper breadth of her "a," and Warren, listening, felt a thrill of recognition.

"How did she look?"

"She was pretty and young, with brown hair and dark eyes, and fur on her hat, like you said. She looked worried."

"What name did she give?"

"B. Smith."

The pawnbroker's rapid unbending was almost startling.

"Did she give any address?"

"No. She said she would come for the watch 'latah.'"

"Which way did she go when she left here?"

"Toward Broadway."

"Thank you. That's all. And—I wish you'd keep the money. What you've told me is worth it."

"Nothin' doin'."

"All right. Thanks again. Good morning."

Warren was at the door when the pawnbroker answered his unasked question.

"Say, I give her thirty dollars on it," he called out

Warren nodded and went thoughtfully into the street.

He had learned all that he could hope to learn, and the information was reassuring. With thirty dollars she was sure of food and lodgings for several weeks, and if she failed to find work before the money was gone, she probably had something else she could pawn—rings or clothes or furs.

In the mean time—the conviction settled upon him with cold finality—there was absolutely nothing that he could do. However worthy his interest and laudable his purpose, he could not pursue the girl like the villain in a melodrama. The only way of tracing her, that of putting detectives on the work, touched the surface of his mind, to be immediately thrust away. No, there was nothing he could do, except to wait for the letter she had promised him, and which, he suddenly realized, would come in Henrietta Warren's care, as Miss Smith knew neither his address nor his first name. Sooner or later, she would send that letter. He was sure of it. However long or short the interval, she seemed as remote from him as if she dwelt on another planet.

He walked across to Broadway and then up-town, for no other reason than that she probably had done so; and even as this mournful reflection came to him he remembered that he had eaten no breakfast. He tried to regard this detail as trivial, but it continued to force itself upon his attention and he returned to his rooms with a brisker step than he realized, and resumed his revery over the meal that was promptly served to him.

As he ate his depression lifted. The day was yet young. What should he do with it? Should he go out of town, away from her, or should he remain and be near in the event that— That what? That she called

him up by telephone? He knew she would not do that.

Of course the sensible thing was to go to the country and have his golf, but he was oddly disinclined toward the sensible thing. Therefore, why do the sensible thing? Instead, he would indulge his mood to the full. He would remain in town for the sole reason that she, too, was in town. It might be folly, but at least it was glorious folly. It carried him straight to the telephone, where with a smile at his own expense he rang up his country club and canceled his order for a room.

V

BARBARA ENTERS A STRANGE WORLD

AT nine o'clock on that same morning a young person, who was resolutely thinking of herself as Barbara Smith, made her way from a Third Avenue pawnshop to Stuyvesant Square and gratefully sank upon an empty bench. She had thirty dollars in the hand-bag she was holding in a grip that numbed her finger-tips, and she was conscious of a mounting elation of spirit. She was still carrying her traveling-case—the case over which Warren had stumbled the night before, and she was further encumbered by a morning newspaper which she believed held dozens of alluring advertisements of "lodgings."

Lodgings, now, were what she was after—lodgings that would include a late breakfast. She was hungry; but she had no wish to stumble into unknown restaurants, and the only places with which she was familiar were the expensive resorts of Broadway and Fifth Avenue—resorts in which the most Spartan repast would mean a gap in her thirty dollars. At the thought of this her grasp tightened on the hand-bag. Dropping the case at her feet, and still holding the small bag firmly in her left hand, she opened the newspaper and, trustfully spreading the sails of its wide sheets to the breeze, gave her attention to the advertisements of "Rooms to Let."

It was as she had expected. There seemed to be hundreds of them—yet, strangely, none exactly suited her needs. Many referred to "light housekeeping," and from these she turned with a frown of distaste. Light housekeeping, she inferred from the fiction she had read, meant boiling eggs over a gas-jet, and spreading wet handkerchiefs on one's window-panes.

Neither of these domestic activities appealed to Barbara. She would adjure light housekeeping, therefore, even if the alternative meant putting nickels in the slots of automat eating-places and drawing out pieces of pie—presumably from the same slot. Or would it be from the same slot? The speculation was interesting. She permitted her mind to dwell on it for a moment, then dismissed it with the comfortable reflection that some day she would surely know.

Rooms, rooms. Big rooms, little rooms. Rooms on the ground floor, rooms on the top floor. Rooms with a view; rooms with hot and cold water; rooms with private bath. Over these last Barbara lingered a moment with a futile sigh, then hastily turned to less appealing descriptions.

Half an hour passed. She was on the point of throwing away the newspaper in despair when, at the bottom of a long column, she saw a four-line advertisement that met her eyes with a wink of understanding:

> TO RENT—To a single gentlewoman, a small, charmingly furnished room up one flight of stairs, in a private house. Breakfasts if desired. References exchanged. Apply personally between 10 and 12 in the morning.

The street and number followed. The street was one

of the few she knew, on the West Side, in the Fifties, between Eighth and Ninth avenues, in a section she had been told was good, though not fashionable.

She carefully reread the advertisement, weighing each word. She liked them all, even the two which most disturbed her—"references exchanged." It was fitting that references should be exchanged. It was unfortunate that she herself had none to exchange. But, in addition to the references, the owner of this private house with its charming room evidently intended to inspect all applicants. Hence the request to apply in person. She appeared to be a nice woman and a careful one. Also one who knew what she wanted, which was as it should be. Barbara Devon knew what she wanted, too. She wanted a charming room in just such a place as the one described. It was doubtful if she could afford it, but at least she could apply in person and learn.

She rose and, taking up the heavy traveling-case with a jerk of decision, started toward Broadway. Yes, she would go and look at the charming room in the private house. If she liked its appearance, and if its owner liked hers, there would be time enough to talk of price and references. For two hours she had endured the sensation of being homeless in New York, and, though it was a new one, already she had wearied of it.

The house, when she reached it, looked as attractive as the room was declared to be. It was one of those houses, rare in New York, with minute lawns separating them from the sidewalk. To reach the wide front door one passed through an iron gate and up a graveled walk. Barbara rang the bell with growing approval. Almost immediately the door was opened.

A capped and aproned maid confronted her without curiosity.

"I would like to look at the room," began the caller, "if I—"

"Yes, madam. Wait here, please."

She was ushered into a wide hall and motioned toward a seat. The maid disappeared, and the caller felt at liberty to look around her. The hall, like the approach to it, was very inviting. Fine old rugs lay on the polished floor. The bench on which Barbara sat was a heavily carved Florentine piece whose age and beauty she recognized at a glance.

From an open door at the end of the long passage came the sound of voices and a soft laugh. It was a delightful laugh, deep-throated, rich, and so contagious that Barbara unconsciously smiled as she heard it. A woman came through the door, throwing a few words over her shoulder to some one she was leaving behind, and walked toward the visitor, still wearing a smile that was the aftermath of her contagious laugh.

Barbara watched her curiously as she approached. She was a large woman, a worldling to her polished finger-nails, but she carried herself with a fine dignity which lost nothing from the good-humored, smiling tolerance that seemed her usual expression. Her hair and eyes were very dark—almost black, and her skin showed the healthy pallor peculiar to certain deeply brunette types. She wore a black velvet skirt and a cream-colored lace blouse of immaculate freshness, and she carried in her hand a pencil and a note-book in which, evidently, she had been making some household notes. Nothing could have been more reassuring than her engaging personality.

Barbara rose as she approached, and found her eyes held by a pair of suddenly keen eyes, which softened as they looked at her.

"Good morning," smiled the new-comer. "My maid said you would like to look at the room."

Both eyes and lips were smiling now, in as casual and intimate a way as if their owner greeted an old friend. Barbara smiled back at her, on an impulse of quick liking.

"Yes, may I?" she asked. "Thank you," as her hostess led the way up-stairs.

"I hope you will like it," the latter said, as they mounted. "It's a rather jolly little room and very comfortable. I forgot to mention in the advertisement that it has a grate, which can be used if one likes an open fire and cares to pay the prices these New York wretches are asking us for wood. But of course the room is steam-heated, too."

They had reached the top of the stairs, and as they turned into the upper hall a little old lady came out of a room as they passed it. She was an exquisite little old lady, with soft, snow-white hair, very dark eyes, and a strong resemblance to Barbara's guide.

"Well, mother," said the latter, affectionately, "aren't you going for your walk this morning?"

The little old lady shivered. "I think not," she quavered. "It's too cold."

"Cold? Nonsense. Why, it's an Indian-summer day!" The other spoke cajolingly, as if to a child. Then, seeing her mother's eyes fixed on the girl at her side, she added an explanation. "We're going to look at the room."

The old lady made way for them without replying.

Barbara, whose heart had warmed to her, was ushered into the chamber she had come to see. On its threshold she stopped with an exclamation.

"Jolly little room, isn't it?" repeated her guide, comfortably.

It was a jolly little room, and it was more than that. Its prevailing tone was white and lavender. The chintz curtains were lavender, and the chintz covers on two wicker chairs and a *chaise-longue* matched them. A lavender rug lay on the floor. The white-enameled bed had a lavender spread, and the white dressing-case and high-boy had glass tops over delicate lavender covers. Each of the little room's two windows looked out on the quiet street and the patch of lawn below. Under the white mantel was an open fireplace with a brass fender.

As Barbara looked around, her hostess crossed the room and opened two doors, side by side. One led to a generous closet. The other, itself only a closet in size, was a miniature bathroom, with a small square tub, in which the occupant could stand or kneel. Above it hung a shower-bath, and in the corner was a stationary stand with hot- and cold-water faucets. As Barbara hung fascinated in the gaping door, the tall mistress of the house, standing beside her, smiled down at her.

"I forgot this, too, in the advertisement," she said. "I'm afraid I'm not a good business woman. Do you like it?"

Barbara sighed. "I love it," she said, simply. "It is so pretty—and so immaculate. But I'm afraid," she added, "it's beyond my means and above my station. I shall have to go farther and fare worse."

"Oh, I don't know." The other spoke quietly, looking

down at her from her greater height and plainly studying her. "How much are you expecting to pay?"

Barbara, who did not know, parried. "How much is the room?"

"Well—" Her hostess dropped into one of the wicker chairs by the window, and motioned to the other. "Sit down," she invited, "and talk it over."

Barbara sat down. As she did so she discovered that the little old lady was also in the room. Her daughter observed her at the same moment, and looked at her smilingly, with slightly raised eyebrows, but without speaking. Barbara, who had taken a chair by the second window, facing her hostess, noticed that the mother sat down on the *chaise-longue* a little behind her daughter and, crossing her hands in her lap, prepared to listen to the talk that followed. Her gentle old face held something of the expression worn by a child who, uninvited, has followed its nurse into a place where it is not desired but firmly intends to remain.

Almost before they were seated the hostess resumed the discussion of terms.

"The price of the room is fifteen dollars a week," she said—"without meals, of course. And I'm told by every one that, considering what one gets, it is most reasonable. You see, I did not furnish it to rent, but for my young sister, who has gone abroad."

Seeing the shadow that fell over her guest's face, she went on, almost without a pause:

"But, as it is getting late in the season, possibly I can let you have it for a little less."

The guest shook her head and rose. She was not good at figures, but she had had no difficulty in grasping the

fact that, with only thirty dollars between herself and "the abyss," she could not spend fifteen dollars a week for rent.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It was a nice dream while it lasted. But—I can't pay so much."

The old lady rose at once. Her daughter remained seated. "Wait a moment," she suggested. "How much can you pay?"

Barbara flushed. The situation had become embarrassing. She realized that this woman was trying to help her, and such help was almost a form of charity; for the room was worth more than she had asked for it.

"Can you pay twelve dollars?" asked the other.

Barbara hesitated. She could not—but she wanted that room!

"Suppose we say twelve dollars a week, with breakfast?" suggested her hostess, watching her closely. "I warn you that breakfast will be a very simple affair—an egg, coffee, a roll. Will that do?"

Barbara came to a quick decision. "Yes," she said, "if it is understood that I may not be permanent. Indeed, I may not be here more than a week."

The other's face changed. "Oh," she said, blankly, and added, "that's different."

Barbara, who had not intended to explain, found herself doing so. "It depends," she added, frankly, "on whether I find work. That is what I am looking for."

"Oh." Again the tone was a little blank. "And if you find it, you will stay?" she asked, after a pause. "That is, you wish to stay in New York—if you can?"

"I must stay in New York. The only question is

whether I can earn enough to stay here. I have enough for the moment," she added, literally.

The other's face cleared. Evidently she, too, had made a quick decision.

"Then we will consider it settled," she said, briskly. "Frankly, I can't afford to have the room idle. On the other hand, I want the right person in it. The last woman who had it let the tub overflow and ruined two hundred dollars' worth of paper and paint in the room below. She felt so grieved that she went out and sent me a big box of flowers, and what do you suppose they were? Forget-me-nots!"

Her contagious laugh rang out and Barbara's light-heartedly joined it. The two women looked at each other in intimate good-fellowship.

"So I hope you will stay," ended the hostess, after this refreshing interval.

Barbara felt a throb of gratitude. Really, this experience was quite wonderful. It was almost like coming home.

"I will stay," she said—"as long as I can."

She opened her hand-bag and took out her purse, and as she did so the little old lady, who had not spoken, went slowly to the door. For the first time, glancing after her, Barbara realized that she must be very old. Her step was feeble; her shoulders bent as if under the weight of many years.

The girl took from her purse a twenty-dollar bill and offered it to her companion. "I will pay for a week in advance," she said.

The older woman accepted it with her characteristic smile and nod. "I will send up the change with your

traveling-case. You have trunks, of course. Where are they?"

"Only one. It's at the Grand Central station. I will go over this afternoon and have it sent here."

At the door her hostess paused. "You have had breakfast, of course."

"Of course." There seemed nothing else to say. It was almost eleven o'clock.

"Then suppose, on this special occasion, that you lunch with us—at one?"

"Thank you. I shall be delighted."

Smiling on the threshold, she watched her hostess go down the hall. At the far end of it she saw the little old lady lingering as if waiting for her daughter. Then, closing her door, she gave herself up to the delight of a close inspection of her new quarters. As she crossed the room she stopped short on a sudden thought.

Nothing had been said about references, and—what was much more remarkable, nothing had been said about names! She had not the faintest idea who her hostess was, and her hostess was equally vague as to the identity of the stranger she had so confidingly taken to her hearthstone. Her failure to ask for such information must have been an oversight. Certainly such failure was unusual, but it was part of the charm of the woman. She had admitted that she was not business-like. With a soul at peace, Barbara continued her investigation.

Not the least attraction of the room was its immaculate freshness. Evidently the presiding spirit of this house was a perfect home-maker. She opened the drawers of the high-boy, re-examined her closet space, and stopped to look at the pictures on the wall as she passed them.

There were not many, and each was a delicate sketch or etching of birch-trees—a clump of birches on a wind-swept hill, a dim birch forest, a cluster of birches on the edge of a sunlit pool. They were enchanting things.

Two hours later the sound of a musical gong aroused her from a happy trance in which she had decided that, if this sort of thing was privation, she wanted all she could get of it. Following the summons, she made her way down-stairs, guided by the sound of voices coming from a big room at the right of the hall. As she entered it her hostess rose. A very blonde woman and two men were lounging in front of the open fire. As she crossed the room Barbara had a momentary impression of its size and beauty. There was a vague murmur of names. She found herself speaking to the blonde woman and the men, and the party, including the quiet little mother, moved toward the dining-room in an informal, chatting group.

The man nearest Barbara was a big, good-looking, good-humored, indolent-eyed person, called "George" by the hostess and presented as Mr. Wheeler. For a moment she believed him to be the master of the house, but this impression vanished as the hostess took her place at the head of the table and her mother seated herself at the foot. The new-comer found herself at the right of the hostess, with Wheeler at her right hand. Directly opposite him was the blonde woman, a rather flamboyant person for whom Barbara conceived an immediate and violent dislike. Next to her was an extremely handsome and distinguished-looking Englishman, whose name she recalled as Seton.

"Don't you think," she asked, turning to her hostess

as she unfolded her napkin—"don't you think our friendship has reached the stage where we can trust each other with our names?"

The other woman broke into her soft, rich cascade of laughter.

"We didn't—I know we didn't! I didn't realize it until you came into the room just now. Did you notice how I mumbled? How utterly absurd it was! Listen to this." She explained to the others at the table, and more laughter followed her words. "Child, what *is* your name?" she ended.

"After all this," murmured Barbara, regretfully, "it ought to be something nice—something that would make your faces light up. But it isn't. It's only Smith."

"Smith? I wonder."

It was the voice of the blonde woman addressing the Englishman. Barbara's dislike for her increased.

"Of course you want to know who we are," added the hostess. "The benign spirit at the other end of the table is my honorable mother, Mrs. Parmenter—and I regret to observe," she broke off, "that as usual she is eating something that is not good for her. Mother, you know that caviar and tomatoes—"

Mrs. Parmenter raised a delicate old hand on which several large stones in fine settings reflected the light. "I don't want to hear anything more about it, dear," she said, quietly.

The man named Wheeler chuckled. "That's right, Mrs. Parmenter," he agreed. "Don't let her browbeat you. Under that disarming exterior, your daughter is a martinet. If you don't watch out, she'll have you on a diet of tea and toast."

"No, she won't," declared the little old lady. "I have always eaten exactly what I wished to eat, and I continue to do so."

"I should say you did," her daughter groaned. "What did you do with the milk toast the doctor ordered?" she added.

"I left it there for Robert Bruce." The little old lady pointed to a spot on the hearth-rug, where a fat and aged bulldog was largely engulfed in a dish of milk. "I think," she added, thoughtfully, "Robert Bruce likes it."

Wheeler chuckled again. The Englishman raised his handsome eyes and let them rest on the old lady with a glint of approval in their depths. The blonde woman laughed exuberantly; the daughter smiled her tolerant smile and returned her attention to Barbara.

"My name is Novikoff," she said. "My husband was a Russian."

Barbara caught the tense. "You look as if you might be a Russian, too," she suggested.

"That is my Spanish blood. My mother is half Spanish."

The luncheon moved on its pleasant way. It was an extremely good luncheon. Mrs. Parmenter ate everything that was served, regardless of her daughter's disapproval.

"Mother is really very ill," she explained in an aside. "She is supposed to be on the strictest kind of a diet. But look at her!"

Barbara looked and smiled. The little old lady had been lost to the world in a rich pastry, of which she was even then swallowing the last crumb. Meeting the girl's eyes, an elfish light appeared in her own, and she

nodded affably. "I have my way," the nod seemed to say.

As she turned away the old lady caught the eyes of the blonde woman, and on the instant the half-smile was wiped from her face. Her little body stiffened. Instant and complete antagonism was expressed in every line of it. Barbara saw, and wondered.

After luncheon Barbara returned to her room, intending to put on her hat and coat and go to the station for her trunk. Her campaign was mapped out. To-night she would unpack and get settled. To-morrow she would buy all the Sunday newspapers and spend the day with the advertising sections. Monday she would go forth with the most promising advertisements and look for work. At the thought, a slight, slow chill ran the length of her spine.

A soft knock on the door was repeated twice before she heard it. Hurrying to throw it open, she found the little figure of Madame Novikoff's mother standing on the threshold. Around her tightly closed mouth was a look of stubborn determination—the look Barbara had seen before, in this room and at the table.

"Oh, Mrs. Parmenter, how good of you!" she cried, with genuine pleasure. "Come in."

She led the way to a chair by the window and the visitor followed without a word. Sitting down, Mrs. Parmenter motioned to Barbara to draw her own chair closer. When they were face to face she turned her eyes on the girl's and for a perceptible time held them there. It was a strange look—such a look as Barbara had never faced before, but she met it steadily. When it dropped her eyes fell to the visitor's hands, crossed in her lap. They were trembling.

"My dear," she began, "I'm an old woman. So you will forgive me if I take liberties. How old are you?"

"Why"—Barbara was startled and showed it—"twenty-four."

The old lady nodded. "I thought so. Are you alone in the world?"

"Yes—practically."

"And you are a stranger in New York? You have no friends here?"

"None." She wondered what all this was leading up to.

"Then—I must be your friend."

The girl was touched. "I wish you would!" she said. "You know"—she hesitated, then the words came out with a rush—"you are one of my reasons for staying here. When I saw you in the hall—"

"I know." The other nodded again. "You were reassured. You forgot that you were in a strange house. But, forgive me, dear child, you cannot stay," she ended, simply.

"Cannot—" Barbara stared into the old, wise, tired eyes.

"No, you cannot stay."

"But what—*why?*"

"Because"—the faded eyes shifted—"because, my dear child, this is not the place for you."

"You mean—you mean"— The words came in a whisper. All the girl had heard and read of New York's perils swept over her like a tidal wave. The old lady lifted a quieting hand.

"I don't mean all you think I mean," she explained, gently. "You are not in a den of infamy, if that is what you imagine. But—there are things—reasons—I can't go into them."

The face of the blonde woman swam before Barbara's sick eyes. Other things came, too; things she had noticed, things she had not understood. They were becoming clear. And, because she was young and alone, her imagination continued its appalling leaps.

"Will they let me go?" she whispered.

Mrs. Parmenter almost smiled—almost, but not quite. "Of course! You are not a prisoner! No one has any designs on you! You might stay here for months, coming and going, and see nothing out of the way. But—it isn't right." Her voice changed. "I see them," she ended, bitterly. "But what can I do? I'm only a helpless old woman, dependent on my daughter."

Slowly the swinging world steadied under the girl's feet, and as it steadied her thoughts cleared.

"Isn't it possible that you are mistaken?" she asked. Your daughter is so charming! She isn't—she couldn't be—"

The white head before her went down. "I thought that once," she murmured. "But now—I don't know." Her head rose. "We will not discuss my daughter," she said, stiffly. "But there is no doubt about the people around her."

There was a short silence.

"My daughter means well," the mother went on at last. "She has taken a fancy to you. She wants you here. She thinks it will help to—to avert any suspicion if you are seen coming and going, simply and naturally. But it isn't right that you should stay," she repeated, almost fiercely. She rose. "You won't stay, will you?"

"No. Thank you for telling me. I will go immediately."

"Now?" The old lady was startled. "What will she say? Maybe she will think I—"

Her stubborn look had vanished. She seemed frightened.

"No, she won't. She won't even know I have seen you. I will tell her I have changed my mind. I'll go down and call her out into the hall and tell her at once."

"Yes—I guess that's best. But let me get back to my own room first." The old lady was trembling. She scuttered to the door, and a for a moment wavered there. "I couldn't let you stay, could I?" she quavered, all her assurance gone.

"No, you could not. Thank you. *Thank you!*"

Barbara bent and kissed the faded cheek, then gently closed the door. For a moment she stood still in her little room, fighting a queer dizziness. The room's atmosphere had oddly changed, as if under some poisonous gas. She could not breathe in it, and going to a window she threw it open and breathed deeply the fresh air that poured in.

When she felt calmer she put on her hat and coat, with fingers that shook. As she was drawing on her gloves a knock sounded on the door—a quick, decided knock, very different from the one of ten minutes ago. She opened it and Madame Novikoff breezed in.

"Here's your change," she said, genially. "I forgot to send it to you before luncheon. Are you settled?" Her eyes met the girl's, and their expression altered. "What's the matter?" she abruptly demanded.

Barbara tried to speak naturally. "I have decided that I must leave," she said. "I'm sorry—but I have changed my mind."

The other looked at her. Then, slowly, she nodded. "I see," she said, quietly. "Very well."

Miserably, without seeing it, Barbara groped for her traveling-case.

"One moment." A hand fell on her shoulder, and she was swung about. "Let us understand each other, Miss Smith," said Madame Novikoff, coldly. "Of course you are at liberty to change your mind. That is a privilege I often exercise myself. But I would like to know why you have done it. Is it the price of the room?"

"No."

"I thought not. Are you—" The other's assurance failed her. Her cool tones lost something of their steadiness. "Are you—afraid?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I think you know why."

"You have no reason to be afraid."

"Perhaps not. But I am."

Madame Novikoff turned and walked to the window, where, for a moment, she stood with her back to the room, staring down on the grass-plot in front of the house.

"This is rather hard on me," she said at last, without turning. "I don't like to feel that a young girl is afraid to occupy a room in my house." She wheeled. "You would be safe, I tell you," she brought out. "As safe as if you were my sister. Can't you believe me?"

"I believe you mean it."

One of the quick changes for which there is no accounting took place in the girl before her. Barbara ceased to be a young person named Smith, shivering in an

anomalous position in New York, and reverted to the personality of that Miss Devon who, whatever else she could or could not do, could at least meet a situation with dignity.

"Come," she said, quietly, "don't let us go in for heroics. We understand each other perfectly. If there is any blame in this matter, it is mine. I should have had my wits about me. Good-by."

"Here is your money."

Barbara held out her hand to receive the change from her twenty-dollar bill. The bill itself was returned to her.

"I expect to forefeit a week's rent."

"Nonsense."

The air had cleared. It was the good-humored, tolerant voice of the morning that addressed her.

"You owe me nothing. Good-by, and good luck."

Madame Novikoff followed her out into the hall and to the top of the steps. Standing there, she watched her descend them and open the front door. "Good-by," she called again.

Barbara responded in the same manner. Nothing could have been more simple and natural than the voice and manner of each. Then the girl found herself again on the street, under the burden of her heavy case.

For a moment she stood still, looking about her. Which way should she turn? Which way should she go? No lost and homeless child ever had a deeper sense of desolation than that which filled her soul as she finally turned toward the east.

VI

THE INFANT SAMUEL

AS Barbara walked along the street, rather aimlessly at first, her nerves began to recover from the shock they had received, but her usually alert brain had no message for her. It merely held two scenes—the one which had just taken place in the house she had left, and the one of last night whose setting had been Gramercy Park. She recalled the figure that had towered before her in the darkness, and she felt again the panicky need of this stranger which she had experienced when he seemed about to leave her there. She longed to see him, to hear his pleasant, reassuring voice, to ask his advice, and, yes, *this* time to take it!

Should she speak to him? To get Hendrick on the telephone and learn Warren's address from that willing servitor was an affair of two minutes. Or would it be better still to go back to Miss Warren's rooms—those perfect rooms whose pull in this hour was almost irresistible? A vision of the open fire, the deep chairs, the book-lined walls, rose before her. The security of those rooms —the beautiful, peaceful security of them!

Then something surged up in her, something handed down by generations that had gone before her—the unconquered, unconquerable Devon pride. Her lips tight-

ened. She had not last night's excuse for crawling into the first shelter that offered, she reminded herself. She was not penniless. Indeed, she was quite independent, with the thirty dollars still intact.

She would stand on her own feet. She would do exactly what she had planned to do. She would find a cheap lodging-house, a cheap room, and remain in it until she knew the city. One concession she would make. She would go back to Irving Place, where the houses, though gloomy, were respectable. She would plunge into no more neighborhoods of whose character she knew nothing. She remembered one room in Irving Place—the least objectionable of the many she had visited. She would take that room for a week. It had seemed almost comfortable when she looked at it; now, in retrospect, it actually glowed.

Her courage rose. The glory of the afternoon, too, was having its effect. After all, she asked herself, wasn't she having exactly what she had demanded—new and unexpected experiences? To be in New York only twenty-four hours, and twice during that time to find herself homeless in the streets, must be something of a record. Yes, she was getting what she came for. What more could one ask than that?

At Irving Place a disappointment awaited her. The little room was no longer available. A lady had taken it that morning. The woman who answered the bell, a thin, neat, active little person in a freshly laundered cotton house-dress, explained the situation without sympathy.

"You're the party that lost your purse, ain't you?" she added, distantly. "Did you find it?"

Barbara admitted that she had not, and turned to go.

"Wait a minute." The woman was looking her over uncertainly. "If you found a room, could you pay in advance?" she wanted to know.

Barbara flushed. "Of course," she began, coldly. Then she realized that the little woman's interest was rather friendly. She was leaning against the door-jamb and seemed inclined to conversation. "I had to pawn my watch," she admitted, with a rueful smile.

"H-m-m; that's too bad. But I s'pose your folks will help you out when you write to 'em."

The caller turned away, without confirming or denying this surmise, but again the other stopped her.

"I asked because I know of a room just around the corner," she explained. "A friend of mine, Mrs. Blake, lets her rooms, and when I'm full up I send folks to her. I know she's got one left."

"Are you sure she's—it's—nice? Respectable, I mean?" stammered Barbara. "Do you know all about her?"

"Gracious, 'ain't I told you she's a friend of mine?" demanded the other, severely. Then, relenting, she mentioned the name and number. "Better go and look at it right off," was her final advice. "Rooms go fast this season. Tell her you come from Mrs. Murray," she called as the girl went down the steps.

Barbara went and looked. The house had the typical weather-stained brownstone front of dwellings on New York's side streets, with a short flight of stone steps leading up to its double doors; but the hall was clean, and the woman who showed her the little room was the New England type seen often on the stage and occasionally in life. Her entire personality, from the small knot of hair on the back of her head to the stout soles of her

"common-sense" shoes, radiated the domestic virtues unmitigated by charm.

"It's a good room," she announced as she led the way up three flights of stairs. "It's just the thing for a lady alone—if it's big enough."

It was a good little room, as lodgings go. It was clean, and its one window looked down on the street. It contained a bed, a chair, a bureau, and a wash-stand—all nondescript articles melting into a background of nondescript wall-paper—and it was heated by a coal-stove in the outer hall—a stove now dimly glowing behind a high screen.

"There's only three on this floor," explained her guide. "A young lady—Miss Orleneff—has the small back room, and Mrs. Pearce" (she pronounced it Perse) "has the large one; so I'll be glad to let this room to another lady. Then you can all leave your doors open and get the benefit of the stove. Miss Orleneff's a nice girl," she added, warmly. "She works down-town, so she's gone all day."

Barbara drew out her purse, hoping that soon she would deserve the same encomium. "I will take it," she said. "I mean," correcting herself, "how much is it?"

"Five dollars a week. And there's a clean restaurant three doors away where you can get breakfast for twenty-five cents. Did you bring your references?"

"No, I—"

"Oh, well, I guess it's all right—if you come from Mrs. Murray."

The woman had accepted the five-dollar bill and was tucking it into her purse as a welcome companion to a few pieces of silver.

"Do you think I can get my trunk here from the station as late as this? I want it, of course, to unpack tomorrow."

"Not unless you take a taxi and bring it down yourself. That won't cost much more. But you better not lose any time. It's after five now."

"I will go at once."

The woman lingered on the threshold. "I hope you'll be comfortable," she said, hospitably. "You'll have one clean towel a day."

"That ought to make me so," smiled Barbara

"And I only got one girl, so it's no use to call for things."

"I see. If I want anything you've got, I am to come down-stairs and get it."

"That's what Miss Orleneff does, when she needs hot water or a hot iron."

Barbara followed her out into the hall, and stopped with an exclamation. She had almost stepped on an animated pink bundle, from which a grunt of protest rose. Three white teeth shone up at her.

"How-do," said a tiny voice.

She dropped to her knees, to bring herself more nearly on a line with the pink bundle. It was topped by a small head with violently pink cheeks, the roundest brown eyes she had ever seen, and fluffy brown hair that stood straight out, as if swept back from the baby's head by an eternal breeze. Two very small hands were busy with three building-blocks.

"Why, you adorable thing, you angelic lamb, you perfect peach!" she exclaimed, gazing at the infant in rapture.

The perfect peach smiled again, but kept a fascinated gaze on the blocks. There seemed to be a crisis in building operations. The three blocks, piled one upon another, were tottering.

"Is he yours?" whispered Barbara.

The landlady laughed and looked flattered. Her face had softened. "No," she explained, "he belongs to Mrs. Pearce—your neighbor on this floor. No, Mrs. Pearce, I wasn't speakin' to you," she broke off to explain to a small wraith of a woman who had appeared at the door of the room next to the one Barbara had taken. "That's his mother," she told Barbara.

"You have a darling baby!" said the girl.

"He ain't no trouble," was his parent's tribute. She was holding a piece of sewing in one hand. Now, with a glance at it and a smile at the visitor, she hastily retreated into her room. It was clear that time was valuable to the baby's mother. Mrs. Blake developed the theme she had dropped. "Sammy won't annoy you none. He's as good as gold, Sammy is. Miss Orleneff loves him. She calls him 'The Infant Samuel.' I hope you don't mind young ones."

"Mind them? I adore them. And when they're like this—" Barbara was kissing the top of the youngster's head. He received the attention with a vague murmur, his eyes still on his blocks.

"He plays out here most of the time," explained the landlady. "That's why we got the screen round the stove. And there's a little gate at the head of the stairs, but Mary's left it open again." She closed it on the instant. "You won't mind opening and shutting it, will you? He runs up- and down-stairs every

time he gets a chance and we're afraid some day he'll fall."

"How old is he?"

"'Most two years."

"Can he talk?"

"A little. He's got names for us all. He'll have one for you, and he'll be calling on you in a day or two."

"He will be calling on me in an hour or two, if I have anything to say about it."

There were tears in Barbara's eyes. Their hot stinging of the past hour had ceased, as if the beautiful baby in the pink rompers had put his tiny, cool hands on them.

When she returned from the station, royally seated in a taxicab, she brought with her some trifles she had picked up at the nearest toy-shop, and before she unpacked her trunk she enticed the Infant Samuel into her room and spread these attractions before him.

He accompanied her with entire willingness—staggering in on short, fat legs that spurned assistance. His rompers, bulging in the back, made him look like a pink ball. He sat in the center of the room with a woolly lamb in one hand and a humpty-dumpty in the other, watching the gyrations of a mechanical top. From time to time he put out a tentative finger and stopped the top, for the joy of seeing it started again. His tiny mouth formed a perpetual and excited "O"; his big brown eyes, open to their roundest, shone like little lamps. He liked the toys; he approved of this new slave who fetched and carried so eagerly. The Infant Samuel was content.

It was upon this intimate domestic scene that Sonya Orleneff cast an amused eye when she came home at six

o'clock. Passing the door of the new lodger's room, she stopped.

"Well," she said, "this *is* a family picture!"

Barbara looked up. Samuel uttered a crow and waved both arms, then scrambled to his feet and waddled across the floor. A tall girl, with red hair and hazel eyes, and a thin, keen, highly intelligent face, stood in the doorway, smiling.

"Hello, Samuel," she said.

The infant reached her and fervently clasped a pair of fat arms around one of her legs. He sputtered excitedly and inarticulately. He seemed to be saying a great deal.

"Won't you come in?" smiled Barbara.

"I don't know. I have a suspicion that you're cutting me out. I'm not sure I like it." She bent and kissed the child's floating hair. "You see, the Infant Samuel is the one big love of my life," she ended, soberly.

"Won't you give me a bit of him?"

"I'll see."

She followed Samuel into the room, in response to the drag of his tiny hand. "Go!" he cried, urgently, pointing to the top. "Go! Go! Go!"

Sonya sat down on the floor and wound up the top, grasping at a glance its uncomplicated mechanism. The baby yelped with glee. Both apparently had forgotten Barbara, but she felt no resentment as she watched them together. The woolly lamb was wound up and jerked itself across the floor. The jumping-jack was made to do his little stunt. After twenty minutes, and across the head of the enraptured infant, the two girls smiled at each other.

"Are you new in New York? Or just new here?" asked the caller, at last giving her attention to her hostess.

"I'm new in New York."

"Work? Or pleasure?"

"Work if I can find it."

"What kind?"

"I don't know. You are Miss Orleneff, of course?"

"Yes, Sonya Orleneff. Your nearest neighbor. Mrs. Blake told me about you, just now, when I met her in the hall. We are to share the rapture of the coal-stove and calm each other's fears in the watches of the night."

"I am glad."

"So am I. I was a little worried when I heard that a stranger was up here. But we'll get on—unless we split on this small rock. I warn you, I refuse to be cut out."

"I will be content with half of him."

"Half! I like *that!* You'll get one ear, and no more. I'll cut it off for you myself. You know what we Russians are."

Barbara laughed. She and this girl were friends. They had been friends for eons. As if she read her thoughts, the red-haired girl nodded.

"It's like that sometimes," she said. "Not often."

"It's rather wonderful," said Barbara, slowly. "But I don't think I should know you were Russian."

"My perfect American speech confuses you. I *am* an American. I left Russia with my big brother when I was eight—and I left it gladly. You see," she explained, "we were Jews—and Russia was not treating us well. She killed my father, and my mother died a month later of shock."

"Oh!"

Barbara touched her hand. What things those clear hazel eyes had looked upon!

Sonya frowned. "Now what started me on that!" she interrupted herself to exclaim. "I usually wait several hours before I tell strangers the story of my life!"

"Is your brother in New York?"

"No. He died the year we came to America."

"What did you do? Please tell me?"

"I? Oh, as soon as I could stop crying I got a job as cash-girl in a department store, at three dollars a week, and I mounted by dizzy leaps to a place in 'the cage' at nine a week."

"What did you do in the cage?"

"Made change. All the time I went to night school. Finally I was able to take a course in business correspondence and expert filing—and behold me now! Head file clerk at Wade & Manning's, with an office-boy all my own!"

"You've been simply stunning."

Sonya shook her head. "It's a very ordinary record, but I hope to improve it. I wish you could see what some of our Russian girls have done here. They're stunning, if you like." She rose. "Come, Samuel," she said. "The party is over."

"No," remarked Samuel, with great firmness.

"Is his name really Samuel?"

"Yes. Dreadful, isn't it? The only legacy his father left him, too. But he'll live it down. Come on, Samuel. Your supper-hour has struck. He and his mother take their meals here," she explained to Barbara, "and Samuel dines on bread and milk at half past six."

Samuel protested with vigor. It was agreeable where

he was, he intimated. Why change? He backed away like a fat pink crab, but Sonya hauled him to his little legs.

"Let him take the top," she said as their hostess began to gather up the toys. "But keep the rest of the things here, in a box under your bed. They'll draw him like a magnet, and he will get into the habit of making daily visits to play with them."

Barbara bowed to her wisdom and followed the pair to the top of the steps, where, to Samuel's intense excitement, she succeeded in catching a kiss that was just about to fall off the corner of his mouth. "By," he remarked, affably, as he started his unhurried journey down-stairs.

Barbara returned to her room with a warming sense of companionship. She felt extremely cheerful, surprisingly content. The episode at Madame Novikoff's she catalogued and dismissed. As she knelt on the floor unpacking her trunk, she realized that she had ceased to be haunted by the vision of home which, till this evening, had been so persistent. It was the present that now concerned her—the present and the future. She heard Sonya Orleneff return and move about her own room. Soon a knock fell on the side of her open door.

"Can I help?" asked her neighbor.

"No, thanks—unless you want to come in and cheer me with innocent prattle."

The visitor crossed the threshold and dropped into the room's one chair.

"Don't think you are never to have any privacy," she observed. "But this first night perhaps I can be of some use. Suppose you hand me the things for the closet, and I will hang them up."

Sonya was an optimist. The "closet" was a four-foot strip of wall, concealed behind a faded cretonne curtain.

"It's very good of you." Barbara willingly handed over her gowns as she took them from the trunk. Receiving them one by one, the visitor's eyebrows rose.

"Some wardrobe," she observed, tersely. "But you don't expect to wear these gowns in the haunts of the toilers, I hope."

"Why, they are the simplest things I have—I mean—" Barbara stammered. "Aren't they all right?"

"That one will do—and this one." Sonya surveyed with approval two severely plain tailor-made gowns. "The rest will not."

"Why?" Barbara knew perfectly well. But she decided that she would draw out the speaker.

Her new friend crossed the little room to her side and stood smilingly looking down on her.

"See here," she said. "Look at me."

Barbara looked.

"Mrs. Blake says your name is Smith."

"Yes; Barbara Smith."

"Well, Barbara Smith, you want to be taken seriously, don't you?"

"Why—of course."

"Then, my dear girl, the less you look like a fairy princess, the better. Don't you see?"

Barbara saw, very clearly. She also saw that she had made a serious mistake in not preparing a special wardrobe for her new rôle, and in assuming that the plainest articles of her present wardrobe would do. But there had been no time for the making of these "props," as it were, and

now, of course, she could not explain. What she could do, however, was to hear all Miss Orleneff cared to say on a highly interesting subject.

"I will try to see," she promised.

"I will put it differently. When you bought those clothes you were buying beautiful frames for a lovely picture. That was all right. The picture was—let us say—differently hung. Now it is not on exhibition, and you don't want a crowd before it—do you?"

Barbara flushed at this. Miss Orleneff was going a bit far. "You are too cryptic for me," she murmured, with some reserve.

"Am I? I think not. But words are my favorite playthings. I can make of them anything you choose," admitted Sonya, modestly. "If you want the straight truth, without frills—"

"I do."

"Then you've got to dress your part properly. If you're going to be a working-girl, you've got to look like a working-girl. Otherwise—" She hesitated.

"Well?"

"Otherwise women will distrust you and men will misunderstand you. And both will put you through some horrible hours you might as well be spared. How much do you expect to earn in New York?"

"Why, I don't know. I suppose I'll have to earn fifty or sixty dollars a month, to live here at all."

"Look at these furs!" Sonya picked up the set and held them before her. "They never cost one cent less than five hundred dollars. What do you suppose the man you are working for at fifty dollars a month would think of them—and of you?"

"He might possibly think, if he happened to be an intelligent person, that they represent what we call 'better days.'"

Sonya laughed. "He might if they were moth-eaten. But they're too new."

"Perhaps I'd better pack them away," conceded Barbara, slowly. "Of course, I realized all you have said. And I brought the very plainest things I had. Why, if I had brought—" She stopped abruptly.

"I would pack those furs away," advised Sonya, quietly, ignoring her confession. "Or I would sell them. Now let us finish this job. Perhaps I'd better hang up the clothes while you fill the bureau drawers. Then you will know where things are when you want them. After that, if you like, I will lead you to the best fifty-cent table-d'hôte dinner in New York."

They finished the work almost in silence, but their motions were swift, and in less than an hour they left the house together.

The Russian took her new friend to a quiet basement restaurant within five minutes' walk of their rooms. It was an attractive place, and Barbara, who had never seen anything like it before, looked around with interest. A big open fire burned at one end of the large room, and a kettle hung above it, suspended from a crane. The walls were paneled and the ceiling showed heavy beams. Small, square, white-curtained windows opened on an areaway. A dozen tables stood around, most of them in use.

Sonya led the way to a vacant table in a corner, and briefly intimated to one of a staff of three negro waiters that two dinners were desired. Then, with her elbows

unconventionally on the table, and her chin in the palms of her strong brown hands, she smiled across at Barbara. Her teeth were very white and perfectly cared for. She had a generally immaculate effect which Barbara, who was herself excessively careful in everything that concerned her appearance, found appealing.

"Now we can talk," Sonya said. "Tell me, haven't you really any idea what you are going to do?"

Barbara shook her head.

"Of course you are well educated," murmured Sonya, more as a statement than as a question.

Again Barbara shook her head. "I graduated at a fashionable school," she confessed.

"H-m. That's too bad." Sonya regarded her with sympathy. "No experience? No training? No natural bent?"

"No, none that I know of."

"You would know it if you had it. Have you money enough to take a short business course—in stenography or filing?"

For the third time Barbara was forced to shake her head. "I must earn money at once," she admitted. "I haven't enough to live on for a month."

This time the Russian's eyebrows went up. "But you have courage, my friend," she said, her voice taking on a foreign intonation which Barbara later learned came only under stress of special interest or emotion, or in Sonya's rare moments of embarrassment. With a shrug, she cast off the mannerism, as if it were a garment. "You could be a nursery governess, I suppose," she mused. "It's plain enough that you like children."

Their dinner came, and as they began it Sonya dropped

serious subjects. Once, when Barbara harked back to the topic of work, she waved it away.

"That is another expression of the foreign blood in me," she said. "I like to eat in peace, without using my brains too much. Later we will talk about work."

She pointed out the celebrities of which the little restaurant had its share—the great singer who was no longer great; the man who had once gone with Peary to find the North Pole; and, sitting alone at his table, George Loomis, the cartoonist, who would have been a brilliant artist and a social success but for two things —wine and a certain woman he had married.

"But she keeps him as straight as any one could," Sonya added. "She watches him like a cat. It's a wonder she has left him as long as this. Oh, there she is!"

"She" was a tall, thin woman, in the shadow of forty, with an indolent air and half-closed eyes, who trailed languidly into the restaurant, wrapped in a brilliant red evening cloak, already shabby.

"They have a studio a few doors away," Sonya explained. "Heavens, I hope she isn't coming over here!"

But she was. The long cloak whispered the intention to the bare floor as the tall woman came on, nodding to Sonya and openly staring at her companion.

"Hello, Miss Orleneff," she drawled. "I'm so glad you're here. George and I are having a little music in the studio to-night—at nine. Madame Marini has promised to sing"—she indicated the songstress who was once great, and who, alone at her table, was satisfying an excellent appetite. "And Hempel has agreed to bring his violin. Can you come? And bring your friend, of course?"

She was looking straight at Barbara, with obvious curiosity. There was nothing to do but mention the two names, and Sonya did so.

"Would you care to go?" she asked Barbara. "Would it interest you?"

"As something new, perhaps?" put in Mrs. Loomis. "Something different?" She seemed to recognize at once the alien in her world.

Barbara hesitated only an instant. The invitation had been given in the one way that appealed to her. She decided that she would see this "siren" at closer quarters. It would be interesting, too, to hear Marini—the great Marini she had heard as a child—sing in life's twilight to a few friends.

"Thank you. I shall be glad to come," she said.

The face of Mrs. Loomis lighted so suddenly that it was clear she had expected a rebuff.

"Till nine, then," she murmured, and turned away.

Sonya looked worried, but all she said was, "You're going to get every experience that's coming to you, aren't you, Barbara Smith?"

"I am," declared the stranger in Bohemia.

VII

A STRANGER IN BOHEMIA

BACK in her own room, Barbara somberly surveyed the two evening gowns she had brought with her. One of them was the simplest evening frock she possessed, but in the illumination of Sonya's recent remarks it made her feel, when she put it on, that a municipal Christmas tree would be an inconspicuous object beside her. Still, it was clear that evening dress would be expected. In the restaurant Mrs. Loomis had been shabbily décolleté, and Madame Marini had given her fellow-diners a generous view of her venerable bosom. Sonya herself wore an evening gown when she came to the door half an hour later—a severe black affair with sleeves to the wrists and a neck almost overmodest in cut.

"You look like a romantic Nihilist," Barbara told her, "in act three of a modern Russian play—just before you kill the villain, you know. *Have* you killed him, by the way?"

Sonya laughed. "He's still at large," she admitted. "But I have my eye on him. You're lit up to full candle-power, aren't you? All right. Come along."

As they entered the studio-building and made their way along its dim hall and up innumerable flights of stairs—for it had no elevator—Barbara reflected that she was not really the young person she had always considered

herself. Here she was, a stranger, being guided by a stranger to the abode of other strangers, against whom she had already been sufficiently warned. And this on the heels of an experience which included a lesson to strangers in great cities. But her new mood was a reckless one. The door of the past had slammed shut. In the present she, like those around her, must take chances.

She dropped her evening wrap on a hall settle which already held a dozen similar garments, and followed Sonya into a big, overcrowded, shabby room, in which the first objects she saw were an antiquated grand piano and an open fire. The third was a short, fat gentleman who looked much as a seal might have looked if it stood on its tail and wore evening dress. He was clasping to his breast a violin, on which it was plain that he had just been playing. Mrs. Loomis, still burning incense before him, left his side to greet the new-comers, and, with them triumphantly in tow, returned to him and made presentations with unction. There were very few women at her party; not more than a dozen in all. There were none, she knew, at any party, anywhere, more distinguished-looking than the charming Miss Smith.

Herr Hempel bowed before Barbara until the bald spot on the back of his head lay below her amused eyes.

"We missed your music," she said. "I am so sorry."

"But there will be more—much more." He waved an enveloping arm to show how much more.

"Of yours?"

"But yes, naturally; why not?" The little man forgot that less than five minutes ago he had politely given Mrs. Loomis to understand that his sole number on the program had been played.

"One amuses one's friends," he added, smiling at her good-humoredly. He had brown eyes with a nice look in them. Barbara found herself rather liking him.

"We are very fortunate," she said. "Has Madame Marini sung yet?"

"No, but she sings now, at once. Come, I will find you a good place. It is necessary to be near to Marini nowadays when she sings," he added. "When I was a boy I heard her in Berlin. To the highest gallery, where I sat, her notes came like the songs of skylarks on the wing. But to-day it is different. It is a sad thing when a great voice goes."

They were near the piano, part of a human ring, in the center of which the famous old prima donna stood, impatiently tapping her foot. She was fat, and she was badly dressed in rather bizarre, ill-fitting clothes, which looked as if they might have been part of her former stage wardrobe.

It was doubtful whether she still could sing, and rather tragic that she should try to do so. But, looking at the haughty old head in its blond wig, Barbara remembered the triumphant figure she herself had seen on the Chicago stage when she was a very little child, taken to her first opera matinée, less than twenty years ago. Even then Marini was past her glory, but she had thrilled her audience and given one child an imperishable memory. Often, afterward, Barbara had heard Marini, and always with a reminiscent thrill. There was something of the old power left in the black eyes that to-night swept the waiting circle.

"But, if he is not here, who then shall play for me?" she imperiously demanded, in French. "Is it expected

that I sing without accompaniment? But no. That I will not do."

She crushed the yellow sheets of music she held in her hand—sheets time-worn like their owner, and turned haughtily as if to leave the circle. Mrs. Loomis looked desperate.

"But, madame," she begged, in surprisingly good French, "wait but a little moment, I implore you! Without doubt some one here can play—"

"And destroy my effects? Without doubt!"

The old singer spoke sourly, but she hesitated. It was plain that she wished to sing. It was to have been a little occasion, with perhaps some breath of the adulation for which she longed. Barbara waited a moment, but as no one moved or spoke, she stepped out of the circle.

"If Madame Marini will make allowance for an amateur who means well," she said, in French, "I shall be happy to attempt to play for her."

Mrs. Loomis gurgled into ecstasy. Madame Marini covered the volunteer with a flashing glance that swept from her head to her feet. Then, with a murmured "But, thank you," she walked toward the piano and laid the yellow sheets on the music-rack.

Barbara glanced at their titles. She knew these arias —these well-worn old Italian favorites; she had heard them a thousand times; yes, and had heard Marini sing them. Their accompaniments held no perils. She thanked her gods. If the singer had attempted something modern, something of Débussy or Richard Strauss, with which she might not have been familiar, she would not have felt such peace. But Marini was true to the musical gods of her youth.

Barbara played the introduction to the aria the singer indicated, and the frown lifted from Marini's brow. She muttered a word or two, dropped a pudgy hand on her accompanist's shoulder, and began to sing.

At the last note, Barbara looked up. There was something of that wonderful voice left in its rusting cage—something that profoundly moved and touched the girl. How much was memory, how much tradition and imagination, she did not know. She only knew that her eyes were full of tears, and that she hoped Marini would sing again. The old artiste smiled. Her eyes were almost brilliant.

"But it is not so bad, eh?" she said. "Come, they want more, our audience! We will give them more."

She sang on and Barbara played for her, losing all self-consciousness, putting her heart into the music. A sense of unreality enveloped her. Was it, could it be she, Barbara Devon, who was playing for Marini—Marini, old, forgotten, but, yes, at moments, still great?

Not until the singer's voice showed signs of strain did the audience let her stop. Then Marini, in high spirits, drew the girl's arm through her own and led her to a seat beside herself on a big divan, clinging to her elbow when Barbara tried to slip away.

"Let us alone," Marini said to Hempel when he approached. "Or if it is to eat, bring us something here. We are tired—my young friend and I. But does she not play beautifully?"

"She shall play for me," declared Hempel, grandly. It was the highest tribute he could offer.

"But no!" The old prima donna frowned. As Hempel laughed her frown deepened. "You are without

consideration—you," she declared. "She is tired, I say. She shall play no more to-night."

Later, when the stronger attraction of food had drawn the men away from them, the singer turned to Barbara. "Listen, my child," she said, "they desire me to sing in vaudeville."

Barbara sat up. "Who does?" she demanded, wrathfully.

"Do not become excited. But it is a compliment!"

"Of course. I—I—"

"At first I felt as you do. It was not to be thought of. And I know it is my name they want, not me." She sighed. "They do not offer much," she ended. "But, it is possible—"

Barbara understood. The old woman needed the money.

"Dear madame," she said, "it would be very charming to make so many new friends—and to make happy so many who possibly have not had the privilege of hearing you in opera. It is necessary to remember that. All the stars are going into vaudeville now. One does not lose caste."

The other's face brightened. "It is true," she said. "Also, it is decided. Next month I have what they call a 'try-out'" (she used the English words)—"a week in New York at the Mason Theater." She stopped, but it was plain that she had more to say. "If you and no other could play for me!" she sighed. "But there is the little Martinelli. They have engaged the little Martinelli," she ended, gloomily. "And what is he? I will tell you. A worm. To him life is a package of spaghetti. Through it he eats his way."

Barbara laughed at this heartfelt tribute to a countryman. She wondered why Marini, Italian born, not only habitually spoke French, but evidently thought in the same language.

"Without doubt I will be at your first night," she promised.

Hempel was playing again, and they listened. Half an hour later he had rejoined them, this time escorting Sonya.

"Why didn't you tell me about your music?" the latter demanded. "There's your work."

"I don't see why. I can't teach, and I'm not a professional soloist."

"Perhaps not. But you can accompany people, don't you see? Mr. Hempel says so. He will give you letters to the musical managers. Many singers want accompanists every day, while they practise—"

The voice of Marini interrupted her. It had the quality of a dove's cooing under the eaves. "If it were not for the little Martinelli—" she mourned.

When they parted, an hour later, she urged Barbara to come and see her, giving the address of the Garibaldi, an Italian hotel on a down-town side street. The girl's final picture of her showed her with a glass of punch in one hand and a sandwich in the other, gazing reproachfully into space.

"But for the little Martinelli," she muttered.

VIII

WORK—AND MR. BATES

THE INFANT SAMUEL and Miss Barbara Smith were informally breakfasting together. The attention of the Infant was centered on his food; that of Miss Smith was centered on the Infant. She had known him less than forty-eight hours, but already it was clear to her that she could not live without him. From the moment of their first meeting she made ceaseless efforts to win a response to the passion he had aroused in her breast, and now such response seemed dawning. He called her Baba and let her wait on him. At present, from a jar at her elbow, she was covering thin slices of toast with thick layers of marmalade, and pressing them into Samuel's ready hands. Through a slight veil of marmalade the face of Samuel beamed on her. He approved of her. She was the only grown-up he had ever met who grasped the full meaning of the words "mo' yam."

Upon this edifying scene the figure of Sonya Orleneff obtruded itself. For a moment she stood unobserved on the threshold of Barbara's room, watching the absorbed pair who faced each other on the floor.

"In exactly two minutes more," she then remarked, "that child will burst. And what you will say to his bereaved mother—"

Barbara ignored the implied criticism. The Infant Samuel looked up, and, meeting the visitor's disapproving gaze, chortled winningly, and with some effort extended his arms.

"Ou'do'," he remarked, as graciously as a mouth full of jam would permit.

Sonya gathered him up. "He wants to go outdoors," she interpreted. "I should think he would. I should think he'd want fresh air and a stomach-pump and a doctor, and a lot of other little things besides." She turned appalled eyes on the empty jar. "For Heaven's sake, Barbara Smith," she gasped, "haven't you got *any* sense about children? Haven't you ever *seen* one before?"

Barbara reddened, and with an effect of carelessness dropped her napkin over the too-eloquent jar.

"It was so amusing to see him gobble," she admitted. "And we can't breakfast together again till next Sunday, you know, so he'll have time to get over it. It was fun getting breakfast in my room, too," she added, with a natural desire to change the subject. "Your gas-stove worked beautifully. The eggs were perfect and the coffee was really very good."

Over the floating mane of Samuel, Sonya surveyed the thick substance in Barbara's cup and the agate-like mass in the bottom of her egg-glass.

"It must have been a Lucullian feast," she commented. "Just the same, I think I'll give you a few hints before you try it again. And Samuel," she begged, "please don't kiss me till I've washed your face!"

The Infant Samuel was deaf to the plea. He was depositing circles of marmalade on her left cheek and under her ear.

"Dow-tay—ou'do'—ta-wat," he gurgled, alluringly.

Sonya knelt and, holding him at arm's length, regarded him with warm admiration, while she made rapid passes over his features with a wet end of Barbara's one towel.

"He thinks he's able to go down-stairs and outdoors and take a walk," she translated. "There's pluck for you, when his little insides must be tied up in a double knot! Also I call your attention, Miss Smith, to another triumph of mind over matter. Your jam is gone, but you remain. Does Samuel cling to you? Not he! He turns to me for those calmer intellectual pleasures which he and I have always enjoyed in each other's society."

The Infant uttered an anguished howl. Soap had entered his eyes. More soap was entering his mouth. He planted a bulging little shoe in the center of Sonya's stomach and, thus braced, removed his features to that point in his orbit which was farthest from the towel.

"It's a beautiful thing, this intellectual communion," murmured Barbara, watching him with sympathy. "Want to come to Baba, Samuel?" she added.

"W-e-s-s-s!" roared Samuel. Tears of resentment stood on his fat cheeks. Sonya released him with a final rub, and he fled to the shelter of his new friend's breast. "Ba'-Tony-hur'-Sammy—ou'do'-tawa-kick," he sobbed.

Barbara patted his heaving back. "Have we time to take him for a walk?"

"We have not. This is Monday morning; not the day of rest. I've got to be down-town by nine o'clock. Of course, if you'd rather play with Samuel than look for a job—"

"I would—but I won't," Barbara admitted, with a sigh. "I will explain to Samuel. Samuel, look at me!"

Samuel looked, with utter trust. His round eyes shone; every tooth in his head was revealed in his irresistible smile.

"Ta-wat," he repeated, blissfully.

Barbara took his hand. "I simply can't disappoint him. He would haunt me all day. I'll take him for a swift whirl around the block while you are putting on your hat."

"All right. I'll give you ten minutes." Sonya looked Barbara over. "I'm glad you've dressed the part," she said, taking in the other's severe tailor-made gown and white collar.

Accompanied by a small boy for whom life at the moment was a peal of joy-bells, Barbara sought a Third Avenue shop and bought Samuel a toy she fondly hoped would occupy his mind until her return at night. She also purchased a bag of marbles. The immediate necessity of trying out these possessions hastened Samuel's steps homeward, and she left him so absorbed in them that his sole reply to her poignant farewell was an absent "By."

When they were on a Third Avenue elevated train, rattling down-town, Sonya turned to her. "Now, if you can give me your attention for a moment," she said, severely, "we will talk business."

Barbara tried to listen. It was not easy. Just across the car an Italian woman cowered in a white agony, obviously on her way to the nearest hospital, in charge of a husband whose eyes saw nothing but her thin-lipped face and the signs on the station platforms.

"Why *do* they wait until the very last minute?" muttered Sonya, following her glance. "One can't understand it, but they always do."

Barbara nodded. She had not known that they always did. The fact interested her, together with many other facts in this world she was seeing from such a new angle. It seemed impossible to think of her own affairs when the affairs of others were so absorbing. She gloomily decided that she lacked concentration.

"My plan," repeated Sonya, firmly, "is this." She held her friend's absent eyes until life had returned to them.

Barbara forced herself to attention.

"Do you even realize where we are going?" demanded Sonya, with unconscious pathos.

"Yes, we're going to Wade & Manning's, the publishers."

Barbara did not wish to realize where they were going. She wished to speak of things that would help her to forget it, and to forget, too, an unpleasant sensation at the pit of her stomach. In short, she wished to forget that she was intensely nervous—that, actually, she was afraid. "You are file clerk there," she added.

"I am in charge of the files," corrected Sonya, sedately. "Big business-houses pay well for file-work. I am getting fourteen hundred a year, with a possible sixteen hundred to come. But—I'm not satisfied with filing. I want—" For once her self-confidence failed her. She hesitated, looking conscious. "I want to write," she blurted out. "I suppose every one does, but I—well, I've simply got to. I've been doing it for the last two years, giving all my spare time to it, and selling a good many of my things. As soon as I am sure of any kind of a living, I intend to drop filing and give all my time to writing."

"That's splendid," Barbara said. "I knew you had a big ambition of some kind. It shows."

"I hope so. Well, what I started to say was this. I shall ask Mr. Bates, who is in charge of our circulation department, to give you a job addressing envelopes and folding circulars. It is the smallest job in the place, and the worst paid. You will get eight dollars a week; but I think you're sure of that, for this is the beginning of our busy season and we're taking on girls as fast as they apply."

"But I can't live on eight dollars a week."

"Of course you can't. But the fact is, my dear girl, and you've got to look it in the face, at first you won't be worth even that."

Barbara flushed. "I suppose that's true," she admitted.

"The encouraging thing is that with your brains you will learn the job about five times as fast as the ordinary beginner. For example, you will start with the knowledge that Columbus is in Ohio and not in Minnesota, and such knowledge will help immensely. Half the grammar-school girls who come to us for this work seem to think Seattle is in Mexico and that the best guesser makes the best clerk. You will be a comfort to Mr. Bates, because he won't have to make a blue-print for you before you address your first envelope. He will begin to notice you, to promote you, and in a few months you should have something worth while. At least," she added, cautiously, "that is the way it *ought* to turn out. It doesn't always, of course. But if it does you can take a course in filing, and then you will be in line for my work when I am ready to drop it."

Half an hour later, facing Mr. Bates, Barbara was not at all sure that it would turn out thus in her case. This new arbiter of her destiny was a tall, thin, clean, aloof young man, who had a depressing habit of glancing past the profiles of his employees as he talked to them. He sat at a raised desk at the end of a huge room, filled with long tables, at which several hundred girls were stealthily suspending work to glance at the new-comer. Sonya, having presented her protégée, faded from the scene, leaving Barbara standing before the efficient Mr. Bates, who, to her surprise, remained seated.

"Name and address, please," he said, briskly. "What experience? What references?"

She gave her new name and address, and reminded him that Miss Orleneff had vouched for her. Bates seemed to have forgotten Miss Orleneff, but he nodded.

"All right. We'll give you a week's trial, at eight dollars. Miss Martin!"

A tall, rather heavy-faced, serious woman in the forties rose from the head of a table near them and came forward as if a spring in her had been touched.

"Find a place for Miss Smith."

Bates turned back to the work on his desk. The interview was over. Barbara was conscious that Miss Martin was taking her in with a quick but close scrutiny. She led her to a table, forced several girls to move closer together, pushed a chair into the space thus made, and swept envelopes, pen, ink, and a blotter before the new-comer—all with what seemed to be one swift, efficient movement. It was clear that she was accustomed to finding places for beginners. A little later Barbara

learned that Kate Martin was one of the finest human machines in the great establishment.

"It's easy enough," she said. "There's the list; here's the envelopes. Just address 'em as fast as you can, but be sure you're right before you go ahead. You are expected to do at least a thousand a day. Write clearly. If you get stuck, Miss Leigh will help you out, but we don't allow much talking. You hear me, Mamie?"

She was gone, and the new employee was left with her envelopes, her list, and her right-hand neighbor—the last a fat, good-natured girl whose complexion suggested that she habitually lunched on butter-cakes. Barbara smiled at her, and Mamie Leigh smiled back.

"New on the job?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Listen. Don't try to be too quick at foist. Put yer list here. Put yer env'lopes there."

She gave Barbara a brief lesson in efficiency and motion-saving. Her pupil was impressed. Without this instruction, she lightly estimated, she would have wasted several thousand motions.

The big room was light, and there was a good air-supply through the open tops of numerous windows. Notwithstanding the presence of several hundred workers, the only sounds were the rustle of papers, the scratching of pens, the clatter of typewriters, and a rare low word. Barbara addressed an envelope, and, forgetting her surroundings, leaned back for a moment to regard it with proud proprietorship. It was her first finished piece of work in the commercial world, and she would be paid for it. She was aroused from this gratifying reflection by the voice of Miss Leigh at her ear.

"My Gawd!" whispered that young person, "d'ye think you've made a Christmas card?"

Barbara dropped to the present.

"Get busy! Get busy!" hissed her neighbor. "Don't ye see Martin's got her lamps on ye? Say, listen. What's yer name?"

"Barbara Smith."

"Well, Miss Smith, you'll last about a hour if you keep this up. Are ye on?"

"Yes, thank you. I—I forgot."

Barbara bent her head and worked steadily, almost frantically, to make up for her absent-mindedness, and the face of Mamie Leigh softened as she observed her. As she would have expressed it, the beginner was "takin' holt." The beginner's neck began to ache, and she changed her position. It interested her to experiment in motion-saving. It was surprising to discover how few motions were needed in her work. Her eyes grew tired, but she raised them only at long intervals. The morning seemed endless.

After several centuries a bell rang. Miss Leigh checked her pen in the middle of a word, and, leaning back, stretched her arms luxuriously.

"Me for the eats. Know where yer goin'?"—to Barbara.

"No."

"All right. Come 'long. I'll show you where you get more for ten cents 'n any place in town."

Barbara went. Her curiosity was aroused. After a brisk walk, which Mamie Leigh filled with intimate anecdotes of Bates and Miss Martin, they sat down at a crowded table in one of the cheap restaurants of which

Miss Devon had often heard, where uplifting texts on the wall alternated with price-cards and cautious injunctions to watch one's hats and overcoats. The place held twice as many human beings as it was designed to hold, and each of these was impatient and hungry. A yellow-gray atmosphere of butter-cakes hung over it.

"Butter-cakes 'n' cawfee," ordered Mamie Leigh. "Fer two. And say, Jenny, mind yer step! We're in a hurry."

The butter-cakes and coffee came promptly, though not with an expedition that satisfied the exacting Miss Leigh. They were surprisingly good. Barbara ate them with relish, and then thoughtfully studied the bill of fare. She was amazed to discover how much food one could get for ten, fifteen, or twenty-five cents.

"The ice-cream and layer-cakes here is great," contributed Mamie Leigh, looking at the menu over her shoulder. "Cheap, too. Ten 'n' five. But none fer mine. Ten a day's my limit," she ended, with a sigh.

Barbara signaled to Jenny, who was near them. "Ice-cream and layer-cake for two," she ordered. Then, smilingly, to Mamie Leigh, "My treat."

Mamie Leigh burst into sudden bloom. "Say, yer a queen!" she cried. "But you can't afford it, not on no eight per," she added, on a sobering second thought.

"I know. It's only for to-day. To celebrate—"

"Yer first job. I'm on." Miss Leigh was care-free again. "Make 'em big, Jenny," she added, urgently. And Jenny made 'em so big that Miss Leigh's afternoon work suffered severely.

Barbara carried home that night a body protestingly conscious of its day's labor. It wanted to go to bed,

it intimated, and it wanted to go at once. The back of its neck ached agonizingly, its muscles were stiff, its eyes were heavy and tired. But after she had refreshed it with a bath she seated it resolutely on the floor in front of the enraptured Samuel, and played with him until his mother appeared to carry him off.

Barbara looked at her with the surprise she always felt in her presence. It seemed impossible that this worn mite of a woman could be the parent of the exuberant Samuel, whose back and legs might have been a study for an infant Hercules. As if she read the other's thoughts, the mother smiled.

"My boy is like his father," she said, "not like me. His father was killed in an accident. He should have lived a hundred years. He was so strong, so big!"

Barbara laid her hand on the thin shoulder. "His boy will be as big and strong some day," she said. "Think of that!"

The woman nodded and gathered up her baby. She staggered under the sudden weight of him, but the girl made no move to help her. The fat arms of Samuel were clasped around his mother's neck. The waving mane of Samuel was floating past his mother's cheek. The red, round mouth of Samuel was drowsily kissing his mother's ear, and the face of the mother as she looked down on Samuel seemed to illumine the dim room. She turned away with a smile that held something of the miracle of Samuel's own, and Barbara, as she sat down to wait for Sonya, who had explained that she might get home half an hour late, felt that all the lessons of the day had not been learned in Mr. Bates's department.

Never before had she met a woman who worked as

Samuel's mother worked. From eight o'clock in the morning up till six at night she sewed in her little room, her industry broken only by sudden excursions on Samuel's behalf. Before breakfast and after dinner she labored for Mrs. Blake in part payment for the food and shelter given to her son and herself. At dawn Barbara heard her cleaning the halls and the stairs. Sonya had told her the little woman washed dishes and even helped in the laundry, in return for the privilege of using it for Samuel's clothes and her own. She kept her manchild as sweetly fresh as a rose; and the last thing at night Barbara saw above her transom the light that proved her still bent over her sewing. Thinking of it all, the girl sighed and then smiled. Things would be very different with Samuel and his mother after the first of next October!

One Sunday afternoon, when Barbara had been in New York about a month, Sonya, dropping into her new friend's room, tentatively suggested a walk in Central Park. Barbara glanced out of her one window.

"It's going to rain," she objected.

"Snow, more likely. But the Infant Samuel wants to go. Let's bundle him up and take him."

"Will his mother—"

"Rather. You know very well that what the poor woman needs most is to have that mass of quicksilver taken off her hands for an hour or two. And he will love it. Ask him if he would like to go."

Barbara asked him and received the immediate impression of having turned on a sputtering electric current. The form in which Samuel's acceptance was couched was confused, but there was no question of its meaning.

In the Park it became increasingly clear that the Infant Samuel was a lover of nature. With his pink rompers replaced by a "bunny suit" of gray wool, he toddled after the squirrels, looking like a plump squirrel himself. His energy was inexhaustible, his fat legs tireless, his brief, imperative commands incessant. On the edge of the lake he demanded a "bo'," and Sonya fashioned a craft for him out of a bit of wood, with a long twig to guide it. He was directing this boat with energy, and Barbara was withholding him from the water by a firm grasp on the seat of the gray wool trousers, when a familiar voice addressed her. In her surprise she relaxed her grasp, but Warren caught the youngster by the arm, smiling at her as he did so. His quiet greeting betrayed none of the exultation that throbbed within him.

"You are really quite wonderful," he said, as they shook hands. "I pictured you alone, forlorn, and I find you the merry heart of a family circle." He glanced at Sonya, to whom Barbara presented him. "And this," she added, "is the Infant Samuel."

The Infant Samuel presented a round gray back, which Warren regarded with approval.

"Jolly little beggar," he said. "Have you—er—adopted him?"

"Not quite. I wish I could."

"Doesn't he need something to eat? They always do. Can't we all go to the Casino and have tea?"

Barbara shook her head. "Not to-day, thank you. It's getting late, and cold. We must take him home. I think," she estimated, "he has chased the squirrels about eighteen miles."

"All the more reason why his waste tissues should be

repaired at once." Warren laid a compelling hand on the shoulder of the absorbed Infant and forced him to face about. The boat drifted away. "Would you like some milk, Samuel?" he suggested. "And some bread and cake and jam and candy?"

There was no slightest hesitation in the response of the Infant Samuel. "Wes," he announced, and grasped the hand this hospitable gentleman held out.

"You see?" Warren smiled in quiet triumph. "Samuel and I understand each other. *We're* going to eat."

He started off, and the Infant waddled beside him, holding fast to one of his fingers.

"Tum," he urgently directed over his shoulder.

Barbara looked at Sonya, who obediently nodded. Both joined the procession.

In the restaurant, after tea and muffins and jam had been ordered, together with Samuel's substantial evening repast—for Sonya had agreed with Warren that he could eat his bread and milk here and now, with the other delicacies promised him—their host turned to Barbara.

"Now perhaps you will explain," he said, "where you are and what you are doing."

"I am at the Casino," parried Barbara, "taking tea with a gentleman who knows so much about infants that I suspect him of having a large family."

"I've got a large family of godsons," admitted Warren. "Four of them, including a chap his age." He indicated Samuel, whose features were temporarily obscured in a bowl of milk. "But where are you? Please tell me."

"I have found lodgings in the house where Miss Orleneff lives—and Samuel. They are going to keep an eye on me."

"They'll have their hands full," predicted Warren,

with gloom. "Don't give her any rope, old man," he advised Samuel.

Samuel gurgled politely. He was very busy.

"Have you found the job yet?"

"Yes, or, rather, Miss Orleneff found it for me. She is in charge of the files in a big business-house. I am with the same firm, addressing envelopes."

"Good Lord!"

"Of course she realizes that I will soon displace her," added Barbara, complacently. "But I don't mind working in an humbler capacity for a few months. I have thought already of a great many better ways of running the business, and I shall soon make suggestions that will prove my value to the firm. That's the way it always happens in books," she went on, "and New York, so far, has been surprisingly like what I have read about it."

"May I know the name of the firm?"

"No, not yet—not till I have made good. Then I will write you."

"And I'm not even to know where you live?"

She shook her head. "Please be nice," she begged. "Let me have my way about this."

"But there's no reason—"

"There is. It's Mrs. Blake's parlor. It holds an organ, a marble-topped table, a rocking-chair, a family album with a red-plush cover, Mrs. Blake, her niece, and her unmarried sister. They sleep there—in a folding bed—and it is not considered etiquette to keep them out of that bed after nine o'clock."

Warren made a mental note of the name. There could not be more than a thousand Blakes who let lodgings in New York.

"I will leave at nine," he promised, suavely.

"You won't be there to leave." Barbara rose. "Look at Samuel! He has fallen asleep in his bowl. I'm afraid you will have to carry him home."

"I'd love to!" exclaimed Warren, eagerly.

Sonya intervened. "You shall carry him to the 'bus," she promised.

Mr. Warren's friends and business associates would have been surprised to see him ten minutes later, patriarchally carrying a very small boy and escorting two women out of the East Eighty-sixth Street entrance of the Park. With definite tenacity he had attached himself to Miss Orleneff and the Infant Samuel. It was to the former he turned when the little party reached Fifth Avenue and stood waiting for a down-town 'bus.

"Miss Orleneff, may I have the pleasure of calling on you?" he asked, formally.

Sonya smiled. "I shall be delighted." Then, as his face lit up, she added, mischievously, "*When* you call on Miss Smith."

The brief illumination faded.

"And yet they say women don't stand by one another," mused Warren.

He turned to Barbara, and Sonya moved away, leaving them for a moment at least alone in the world. Over the sleeping head of Samuel, Warren made his last plea.

"It means a great deal to me to know where you are," he said, "and be sure that everything is well with you. It means more than I dare to tell you."

Barbara's eyes fell. "You have been very kind," she murmured. "Please don't think I am ungrateful."

"You will surely write and send your address?"

"I surely will."

"When?" He spoke urgently. The 'bus was coming —it was almost here.

"I don't know—yet."

"Name a date. *Please.* Thanksgiving?"

"No. That's too soon. I may not be in charge of the business by Thanksgiving."

"Christmas?" imploringly. The 'bus was stopping.

She shook her head.

"New-Year's Day, then. I can't wait any longer."

He was in the 'bus, depositing the sleeping baby on a seat. With a gesture of large authority the conductor rang the starting signal. The 'bus moved.

"I simply won't get off," Warren added, desperately, "unless you promise to write on New-Year's Day. Think," he added, insistently, "of the saving influence you may have on my life. If you write me that day, I promise to turn over all the leaves that need turning."

"Are there many?"

He nodded.

"I'll write. On New-Year's Day. Now please say good-by."

"All right. Here's the address." He gave her his card. "Good-by, Miss Orleneff." He turned on Barbara his straight look. "You're making the next two months very hard for me," he murmured.

The next instant he was gone. Sonya looked after him as he started up the avenue.

"I like your friend," said she.

Barbara, who was looking after him, too, started self-consciously. "So do I," she admitted.

IX

MAMIE LEIGH AND OTHERS

THE official working-day of Messrs. Wade & Manning was the longest day Barbara had ever known. Each night she returned to her room prostrate in body and almost prostrate in mind. She labored, and labored faithfully, from eight o'clock up till five. Life had become a huge blank envelope, awaiting the swift strokes of her pen. For they were swift. She was on the job. She was doing as well as the girls around her, but the cold truth was that she was doing no better. She was addressing twelve hundred envelopes a day. So was Mamie Leigh. So were the majority of her fellow-workers; and Mamie's sprawling handwriting was certainly as clear, if not as elegant, as Barbara's, while the penmanship of the girl on her left was a joy to the eye in its severe beauty.

Each morning "Miss Smith" began her work with the enthusiasm and courage that followed a night of sound slumber. Each day, after she had written for several hours, her spirits oozed from her as the ink flowed from her pen. It was not that she had any annoying experiences. No one interfered with her; no one praised or condemned her. Mr. Bates had forgotten her existence. So, apparently, had Miss Martin. The girls were friendly,

but reserved. She was not one of them, and they felt it, though they could not have explained why. She was not "stuck up," they told one another. Indeed, she was rather "nice." But there was something— They talked it over and decided that she was "different." They let it go at that.

They were absorbed in their own affairs. Mamie Leigh was "engaged," and at once confided the fact to Barbara. Her "gentleman friend" was a street-car conductor. His wages were twenty-five dollars a week, with frequent "extra pay" for "overtime." Mamie had dreams of gold, and occasionally dreamed them aloud, to the extreme annoyance of a girl across the table, whose fiancé received only eighteen dollars a week in a department store. Winged though whispered words flew over the board.

In depressed moments following the over-consumption of butter-cakes, Mamie admitted to Barbara that her gentleman friend, despite his handsome income, often mentioned with anxiety the high cost of living.

"Why, he said," she admitted, "that even with his twenty-five per there's times when he feels cramped!"

Barbara was interested. In one short chat with any of her fellow-workers she now learned more than all she had learned from the members of her working-girls' clubs. She understood why. The club members had been talking to a gracious patroness whose world and language were different from their own. Mamie Leigh and her companions were talking to a girl as poor and as much "up against it" as themselves.

She learned how Mamie and the gentleman friend intended to divide their finances after marriage. The sum

of five dollars a week was to be saved—at the gentleman friend's urgent suggestion. It left Mamie cold, but she had yielded to his notion. An equal sum was to be paid for the rent of a four-room flat in the hundred-and-sixties —a flat with the cutest kitchen! Already Mamie had a receipt for butter-cakes, given her by the waitress, Jenny. The remaining fifteen dollars were expected to pay for food, gas, ice, car fare, clothes, amusement, doctors, and other incidental expenses of the flying weeks. To Mamie Leigh the amount seemed ample; but she remained blind to the possibility that the girl across the table could survive matrimony on eighteen dollars a week, with no extras.

Incidentally, Barbara had a definite weekly problem of her own. Earning eight dollars, she spent five for rent—too much, of course. But there was Samuel! And there was Sonya! Both were the blue rifts in her sky. She could not lose them. But three dollars a week for food, car fare, and clothing! She eliminated the car fare by walking to and from her work. She allowed herself twenty cents for dinner, and ten cents each for breakfast and luncheon. That left her twenty cents a week for laundry-work and other expenses, and the beautiful Miss Devon humbly washed her lingerie in the bath-tub—a practice severely frowned upon by the landlady.

Barbara herself disliked it much more than Mrs. Blake did. She also disliked other features of her daily life. She disliked the common washroom at Wade & Manning's, in which half a dozen girls were always combing long, untidy hair. She disliked the incessant coughing in the big workroom, the handkerchief-using, the gum-chewing, the stealthy lunching that went on at

the tables. She disliked being ignored by Bates and Kate Martin. It was all so different from what she had expected. She had seen herself "making a hit" from the start, and being promptly removed by the appreciative and observant Bates to that sphere of higher effort which was found in the correspondence or the publicity department.

The receipt of her first wages gave her a Moment. There was another Moment when she paid her rent to the willing Mrs. Blake. She was almost supporting herself—almost, not quite. There was the rub. If she could earn enough to pay her actual living expenses she thought she would be fairly content and certainly more interested in the new experience. To preserve her self-respect, she must earn ten dollars a week. How could she do it?

Sonya, when she appealed to her, was not encouraging. Her red eyebrows met irritably above her red-brown eyes.

"That's the way with you beginners," she complained. "You're so anxious to get ahead that you haven't time to make good in the job you've got. You really aren't worth one cent more than eight dollars at present, Barbara. Why, therefore, should any one give it to you? Because you need it? That's not the way the business world is run!"

"Miss Martin gets twenty. I could do what she does," Barbara murmured.

"You think you could, but you couldn't. Kate Martin is a very efficient woman. We ought to pay her a lot more than we do. The girls respect her, and she can get more work out of them than any one else could. She's a pace-maker, Kate Martin—and a good one."

Sonya looked into Barbara's depressed eyes and her own grew milder. "But don't get discouraged," she ended, comfortingly. "Bates has promised me to keep an eye on you."

Mr. Bates's eye, if it rested on Barbara, rested without interest. It was quite plain that for this young man her unusual beauty simply did not exist —or, if it did, that it had no effect on him. There were other pretty girls in his department, several quite strikingly pretty girls, but they had been engaged to send out circulars and not to brighten the world for Bates.

Barbara both resented and admired his detached attitude. Like many other things around her, it was unlike what she had expected. She admired it whole-heartedly after she overheard his rebuke to an amorous youth in another department, caught by Bates in the act of kissing one of the pretty girls in the shadow of a hallway.

"Keep that sort of thing for your off hours, Elsner," he said, sternly. "The next time I see it 'round here I'll report you." He glanced at the girl, who was concealing her embarrassment behind a veil of tears. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to be sure the girl's willing, too, before you begin," he told the crestfallen boy.

"She was willing, all right," growled the ungallant Elsner.

"I wasn't!" wailed the victim.

The eyes of Bates met Barbara's as she stood fascinated by the episode. A single gleam of something like humor flashed in them. Then, "Don't waste time, Miss Smith," he said, curtly. "You're not in on this scene, you know."

Barbara turned back to the workroom, her face blazing.

The impertinence of Bates! How dared he speak like that to her—how dared he? Then she remembered that she was no longer Barbara Devon, protected by her wealth, her fine old name, her social position. She was merely a working-girl, under the orders of Bates. And if Bates had been the kind of man she had often read about, the kind the girls in her clubs had sometimes told her about, what might he not have said to her? And if he had said it, where would have been her redress?

She was very thoughtful that evening, so thoughtful that Sonya finally asked the cause of her abstraction.

"How many men in offices annoy their women employees by making love to them?" she asked, abruptly.

"Good heavens, Barbara! Has Bates—"

"No. *No!* Nothing like it. But how many do?"

"Mighty few. Every decent man has a natural distaste for philandering in his own office, however much of it he may do outside. Also, and this has its effect, he's never sure whether his employee is smiling at him in love or on salary!"

Barbara frowned. Sometimes Sonya had an appallingly frank way of putting things. "It's an unpleasant subject," she said. "Let's change it."

A fat thump on the door was followed by the bump of a small body, unexpectedly but firmly sitting down. The Infant Samuel was announcing his arrival in his usual informal fashion.

"It's odd that he can't knock on the door without falling over," observed Sonya, as she opened the door and patted the suffering spot Samuel promptly indicated. "Here, Barbara, he has a letter for you! Take it over, Samuel."

The Infant approached somewhat uncertainly as to legs, but with unswerving determination of purpose. His hair, as usual, blew straight out behind him. His round brown eyes glowed with the light of one who fulfils a high mission. In his hand he clasped a letter that showed signs of a troubled journey up the stairs. Barbara thanked him politely and tore open the thin, foreign-looking envelope. Inside was a single sheet of paper, headed with the address of a New York hotel. The note it bore was written in French, in small, tight penmanship. She glanced at the signature—*Christina Marini*—and read the letter with quickening interest.

DEAR MISS SMITH,—My opening is to-morrow night, and the little Martinelli is ill. I, too, am ill—but a cold. It is unfortunate, is it not? Yet I must sing. It is my opportunity. You will play for me? Yes? You will be so kind. And the manager will pay. He has said so to me. Can you come and see me? At once? It is necessary that we go over the music. I thank you.

CHRISTINA MARINI.

Barbara handed the letter to Sonya, and the latter, in response to his imperious demand, passed it on to the Infant Samuel, who, clutching it upside down in a tight fist, pored over it with puckered brow.

"Of course you will do it," said Sonya, briefly.

"Of course."

"That flamboyant evening gown you haven't dared to take out of your trunk will be just the thing to wear."

"Yes. I'd better go now—don't you think? Where is the Hotel Garibaldi?"

"Five or six blocks from here. I'll take you there."

They found Marini in a rear room on the top floor

of the garlic-scented hotel, its windows looking down on a sordid back yard. Entering it, Barbara told herself that it was the fullest room she had ever seen. An upright piano shouldered away from a single bed which rubbed elbows with a shabby wash-stand. Two huge trunks fought for space with a handsome old writing-desk, that in turn jostled an easy-chair from which the padding was emerging. A beautiful ivory crucifix on the piano had for background an elaborate reading-lamp with a broken red shade. The walls of the room were covered with signed photographs of operatic celebrities of thirty years ago, their inscriptions promising eternal devotion to Marini.

In the small space left in the center of the room Marini herself, folded hurriedly into a soiled pink kimono, welcomed them with open arms, which simultaneously swept a collection of lingerie from the padded chair. It was a gesture as efficient as one of Kate Martin's would have been. There were greetings of extended beauty and ceremony. Excellent French filled the room. The callers insisted that the hostess and none other should occupy the padded chair, it being the only chair present. Sonya dropped lightly on the floor among the lingerie. Barbara, less accustomed to the exigencies of such situations, found uneasy asylum on the bed. The voice of Marini grew shrill with interest.

"But it is good of you to come," she cried. "And so soon. You will play? But you are an angel. It is necessary that I embrace you."

She did so, with a fervor that left pink circles on the visitor's cheeks. Then, like an excited child, she dug into a closet and emerged with a large box.

"But you shall see my costume!" she cried. "For the occasion. Regard it! One hour ago it arrived."

She unpacked the box reverently, removing with careful hands the tissue-paper that protected the work of art within. Lifting the latter, she spread it widely before them.

"It is good," she said, with complacency.

Barbara, who had experienced a depressing doubt on the subject of the gown, exhaled a sigh of relief. It *was* good. The old singer's instinct had led her to choose black for her reappearance—black chiffon, black lace, with a glimpse of gold here and there to give it life. Both girls wondered how she had paid for it. They gave fitting tribute to its beauty. With tender hands Marini laid it on the bed, Barbara moving aside to make room.

"And now," the hostess said, "we will try the music? Yes? Three songs, and two encores. If they want them. Who can tell? But one prepares. Is it not so?"

She laughed and shrugged her shoulders, but Barbara observed the nervous intake of her breath.

"It is all what they call 'a gamble,' this vaudeville. To-morrow I have a 'try-out,' one night. If they like me, those people, I am 'booked' for thirty weeks. If they do not like me"—she shrugged again—"it is the end." For a moment she seemed to forget her companions. She stood still, staring at a spot on the carpet. "One can only try," she finished, somberly.

"It will be a great success, madame!" cried Barbara. In that moment she felt that she could not bear to have it otherwise. The singer raised her head and smiled. Her shoulders straightened.

"But yes. We will make it so," she said. "But, I

confess it frankly, never have I been so nervous! Never in Milan, in Paris, in Rome, in Berlin, in Petersburg, in London, in New York—never in all those first nights—so—so alarmed," she added.

They understood. On those nights, in the fullness of her lingering youth, her beauty and her success, the great Marini had sung for more gold, for more fame—that was all, and before those who were prepared to applaud her. To-morrow night she faced not only a strange audience, but the specters in the wings—old age, lost prestige, even the slinking, skulking figure of the Wolf.

"It will be a great success," Barbara repeated, firmly. It was all she could say. "And now, dear madame, may we go over the songs? I desire to do my possible for you. And"—the old Barbara came to the front, the Barbara who could never learn that there was need of money in the world—"it shall be my bouquet to you. I desire your manager to know that I play for you as a friend. He is not to pay me."

Marini, enchanted by the tribute, left two additional pink rings on her young friend's cheeks. Then she made a selection from the yellow sheets on the wabbly music-rack.

"They must be very simple, these," she said. "They must be the songs the people know and love. But, alas! my voice! Is it not a tragedy that now, of all times, I am hoarse? Listen!"

She coughed. Two bright spots burned in her cheeks. Barbara's sympathy for her amounted to a physical ache. She put it into her accompaniment. Never, she decided, had she played as she would play for Marini. They went over the songs twice. Then the old singer shook her head.

"Enough," she said. "You are perfect. But for me —can I sing at all? Mademoiselle Smeeth, I have terror!"

Mademoiselle Smeeth reverted suddenly to the type of young person accustomed to command. "You are going to bed," she declared. "And Miss Orleneff and I are going to put you there. We will give you a hot bath and hot lemonade, and send for a doctor. He shall take this cold in time, and break it up before to-morrow night."

Marini protested, but Barbara had her way about the hot bath and the bed. In half an hour she and Sonya had the singer between her thin and shabby blankets, red-faced but comfortable, quite pathetically grateful, and convinced that she was already cured. Clearly it was long since she had been looked after and waited on. She responded to the attention as a child might have done. A doctor, however, she would not have. Hot lemonade? But yes, if that would content them.

Barbara compromised by giving her the hot drink, putting a hot-water bottle at her feet, turning out the lights, and playing her to sleep in the darkness, while Sonya waited in the small reception-room on the ground floor.

The next morning Barbara was nervous. It was almost impossible to work. Again and again she felt the puzzled eyes of Miss Mamie Leigh upon her, and several times she was conscious of the blade-like glance of Kate Martin. By several thousand years, it was the longest day she had ever known. She broke it at noon by calling at the Garibaldi to ask about Marini's cold. To her great relief, she was told that the prima donna was "up and out."

It had been agreed that at eight o'clock she was to

call for Marini in a taxicab, and to go with her to the theater, where the old artiste was to appear at nine. Barbara's impatience projected her into the hotel at half after seven, and gave her the privilege of putting some finishing touches to the singer's toilette, and of removing an appalling wreath of artificial flowers from her venerable head. In its place, after rearranging the blond wig, she added an Italian comb, and Marini nodded approvingly at her reflection in the cracked mirror over the wash-stand.

They rode up-town in silence. Marini's cold, she explained, was better, but she desired to save her voice. She had not gone to the extravagance of an evening coat, but wore an ancient mackintosh in which Barbara saw her shiver as they crossed the sidewalk to the cab. She at once took off her own evening coat and made the singer put it on. Marini obeyed without protest, raising her chin to have the neck-clasps fastened for her, as irresponsibly as Samuel might have done it.

The Mason Theater was one of the best vaudeville houses in the city. A comfortable dressing-room had been assigned to the prima donna, whose face brightened as she entered it. Also a self-confident little stage-director entered to offer homage.

"I'm goin' to make a few remarks before you come on," he explained, tactfully. "Just to remind 'em who you are, and all that."

Marini shivered. The red spots of last night blazed again on her cheeks. Her eyes looked unnaturally large and brilliant, but her voice had cleared. That gave her comfort.

"But I am nervous—me!" she said.

The little man patted her arm reassuringly. "Don't you worry," he said. "Believe me, your act will go great. We've dug out an Italian set for you. It looks fine—and you look fine, too," he added, graciously.

Barbara could have kissed his hand.

"Just rest. I'll come back and tell you before I go on," he concluded as he left them.

The singer obeyed. Sunk in a big chair, she closed her eyes and sat so still that her companion actually suspected her of having fallen asleep. From the theater came the music of the orchestra, the sound of voices, of frequent applause. It seemed a very short time before the little man reappeared.

"All ready?" he asked. Marini opened her eyes and rose.

"You wait in the right first entrance," he directed. "I'll do my spiel. Then I'll come back and get you."

His voice was very kind. It was plain that he was interested. Possibly, too, like Barbara, he felt the tragedy of this sharp contrast between the present and the past. He left them, and they heard the friendly clapping that greeted his appearance before the audience. He said the right thing, quite surprisingly, and put it in very few words. In two minutes he was again with them. They followed him out on the stage, and the instant the short, stout figure of Marini appeared the large audience broke into applause that continued and grew. The old singer stopped and bowed. Her shoulders straightened. Then, walking confidently down to the footlights, she raised her head and looked over the big house with the slow, characteristic Italian smile she had never lost.

The applause continued. It was a reception to steady the nerves of any artiste, and Marini responded to it like the artiste she was. She became herself, her best self. Barbara knew it by the way she took her place near the piano, by the quiet, calm, assured glance she cast at her accompanist, by the little nod that was her signal to begin. Above all, by her singing.

For Life, which of late years had been very hard on Marini, was wonderfully kind that night. The pianist, playing with a thumping heart the prelude to the first number, hardly recognized the notes that suddenly blended with the accompaniment. Marini had sung better many, many times. But no one in the friendly audience facing her had ever heard her do so, or had expected her to sing to-night as she was singing now. There was something of relief, of triumph, in the applause that rolled from orchestra to galleries as the aria ended.

"Oh, God bless them, the darlings!" Barbara said to herself. "They *wanted* her to succeed. They *wanted* her to!"

They did. There was no doubt about it. They had not forgotten her, after all. And they were glad to be able to give her "the rousing come-back," the newspapers reported the next day. Marini bowed and smiled and smiled and bowed, and withdrew and returned. In the wings a much surprised manager watched her and chewed a black cigar, while a cocksure little stage-director turned toward him a face like a calcium-light.

"What 'd I tell you?" he crowed. "She's the real stuff—an' the peepul know it!"

Marini was repeating part of her first aria. She sang her second number and the applause grew. She sang a

Venetian boat song she had often used as an encore in her best concert days, and the audience cheered. She sang another and they rose to her. For, impossible as it seemed, she was singing now a little as she had sung in former years, and there were men and women in the audience who knew it.

They would have kept her singing for an hour. But when she had repeated all her encores the old singer knew when to stop. She bowed, she smiled, she looked up at the gallery with wet, shining eyes. Many of her countrymen were there. She kissed her hands to them, to every one. Not for twenty years had Marini known such a night. Then she was again in her dressing-room, a room filled now by fellow-artists on the program, by newspaper-men, and a respectful manager. The others said many things. The manager said only one.

"You'll be booked, all right, on the 'big time.' That means sixty weeks, sure."

A quiet man Barbara had not observed before presented himself at Marini's elbow.

"I would like to have a little business talk to-night," he told her. "If you and the young lady will come over to the Plaza now, we will have some supper and settle one or two points."

Barbara did not care to go to the Plaza. She did not know what familiar faces she might see there. But not for worlds would she have changed that look on Marini's face—that look of wondering, incredulous joy.

It was only half past ten when they reached the Plaza, and the theater crowd had not yet arrived. The quiet man, whose name was revealed as Jacobs, ordered an excellent supper, with extremely good champagne, and,

after drinking Marini's health with elaborate courtesy, proceeded to offer her a contract which was almost as good as the one she should have had. To Barbara, who knew nothing of such things, it seemed most generous. To Marini, after the privation of the past five years, it meant affluence. She accepted it at once, and they ate their supper in an atmosphere of general felicitation. Jacobs being then able to contemplate a parting with equanimity, he and Barbara took their charge back to her hotel.

Marini was beginning to show the strain of the evening. She seemed feverish and her voice was growing hoarse. When they left her at the Garibaldi she still wore the new, ecstatic look of the past hour, and she bade them good-night almost as if she were speaking in a dream. Barbara would have gone up to her room, would have helped her to undress, but the singer shook her head. She wished to be alone.

Mr. Jacobs gallantly escorted the accompanist home in the asthmatic taxicab which had wafted them from the Plaza, and left her at her door. He had made a casual reference to her accompanying the singer on the coming tour, but Miss Smith was discouraging. She knew "the little Martinelli" had been definitely engaged. Moreover, she was not sure that her bargain with Laurie included the privilege of leaving New York. She and Mr. Jacobs parted with mutual respect and an effect of finality.

X

THE DEATH OF MARINI

AT noon the next day Barbara rushed up to the Garibaldi, her heart full of congratulations, her arms full of newspapers. Both dropped when the Italian proprietor of the hotel checked her flight past his desk. His usually serene brow wore an anxious frown.

"I am glad you have come, Mees Smeeth," he said. "Madame Marini—I fear, she is not well."

"She had a cold," began Barbara.

The man shrugged his shoulders. "It is, I think, more than a cold. But you shall see."

He waved her to the elevator, and she entered it with a resolute determination not to be anxious. It was quite natural, she told herself, that the excitement of the night before should have temporarily prostrated the singer. The reaction would come quickly, aided by the memory of her triumph and the friendly newspaper notices the girl had brought with her.

But this optimistic theory perished after one glance at Marini's room and its occupant. It was clear that the singer had thrown herself into bed with the least possible preparation. Her clothes lay on the floor, where she had dropped them. Even the new evening gown that was her pride lay crumpled there, its grotesque lines oddly suggesting a prone figure beneath it.

Barbara stepped over it and approached the bed. Marini's black eyes opened and stared at her. They looked abnormally large, and they held an expression Barbara had never seen before. The singer's heavy breathing was audible throughout the little room. She tried to speak and produced an indistinguishable whisper, but her hand came out and Barbara took it, kneeling beside her. She understood now the meaning of the look in those great eyes. It was fear, panic fear—the fear of death.

"Dear madame," she said, gently, "your cold is a little worse, and the excitement of last night was too much for you. So I shall take charge of you. We will have a doctor and a nurse at once. In a few days you will be well."

Something of the panic died out of the eyes fixed on her face.

"Leave it to me," added Barbara. "Now I go downstairs to telephone for a nurse and a doctor. In five minutes I return."

At the desk she gave the proprietor a brief report of the situation, and demanded the address of the best doctor he knew. That very gentleman, it appeared, lived in the hotel; several times he had prescribed for Madame Marini; he was a fellow-countryman. And there was a nurse's bureau only a few blocks away. It was surprising how easily everything was done. The doctor, whose noon consulting hour was almost over, agreed to come in half an hour. A nurse would report almost as soon. Barbara rushed back to Marini's room to make it presentable before these personages arrived.

As she hung up garments and arranged the furniture

in frieze effects along the wall, she chatted cheerfully to the sick woman, resolutely keeping to her assumption that this slight indisposition was a thing of a day or two. Had madame seen the newspaper accounts of her triumph? But no, of course not; how could she? But they were wonderful, quite wonderful. She read aloud several of the best. And Jacobs had said such appreciative things. And how fortunate it was that a whole fortnight intervened before the beginning of the tour. In that time Madame Marini would be so superbly herself.

She was gently bathing the hot face now, and she seemed at the same time to be smoothing out of it all the hard lines of fear and pain. It was a restored and tranquil Marini who greeted the Italian doctor in his own tongue and confidently lent herself to his examination. Over the patient's head the girl made a warning gesture. The doctor nodded comprehendingly.

"A cold, yes," he told the singer. "Be patient, madame. Be tranquil. It is painful here, perhaps? Yes. We will take it in hand, that cold. A nurse arrives? That is well."

The nurse arrived before he left, and in the shadow of the outer hall he gave her her instructions. In this consultation Barbara took a momentary but satisfactory part.

"Is it pneumonia?" she asked.

"Yes, *signorina.*"

"Serious?"

"Very."

"You understand, don't you, doctor, that every comfort must be procured for Madame Marini? Call in assistance if you need it. I will be responsible for all

expense. Would it be better to take her to a hospital?"

The doctor reflected. "It would alarm her," he decided. "She is better here, I think, in the surroundings she knows."

The nurse was a fresh-faced and capable-looking woman, immaculate in the white uniform she put on when the doctor had gone. From the glance she cast about the still cluttered room Barbara inferred that there would be a swift change in its appearance. She herself left madame in those capable hands, with money for the doctor's prescriptions and for new blankets, and with a promise to return at half after five she went forth to solve a somewhat perplexing problem.

She had taken upon herself the expense of Marini's illness. That was as it should be, since, obviously, there was no one else to do it. But how should she meet this expense? What had she that she could pawn?

She was out in the nipping air, walking slowly toward home, and the solution of her problem came to her as if in a message from the weather-god himself. The furs, of course! The silver-fox furs Sonya had said she herself must not wear, and had advised her to pack away or to sell. She had not dared to wear them. They hung in her bedroom, an ostentatious reminder of the past. She would sell or pawn them this very afternoon.

She returned to her room on the wings of this inspiration, and, putting on the furs, wore them out of the house as the easiest way to carry them. They were beautiful furs, and wonderfully comfortable. She was rather vague as to their original cost; her memory was never reliable in such trifles, but it was somewhere in the neigh-

borhood of a thousand dollars. If the pawnbroker would give her five hundred—

The pawnbroker, she soon discovered, would do nothing of the kind. She had naturally turned to the one man she knew, the one who had taken her watch; and though he remembered her, he showed no joy in their reunion.

"One hunderd dollars," he said, briefly, when she had made her faltering request.

"But I am sure I paid a thousand—"

"One hunderd. Not 'nother cent. And lemme tell you somethin', young lady. I take a chanct doin' that!"

She stared at him in wonder. What did he mean? That they were not worth— Then, under the look in his eyes, her face flamed. He had the air of one who enjoys a joke and is willing to share it.

"Good heavens!" she gasped. "Surely you don't think I *stole* them!"

The pawnbroker sobered. "I don't think nothin'," he said. "To think ain't my business. One hunderd. Take it or leave it."

Barbara took it. Her impulse had been to walk out of the shop without another word, but the face of Marini came before her and her pride went down like a lowered flag. In silence she pushed the furs across the counter, and in silence he counted out the money and wrote the necessary slip. As she took the dirty bills she instinctively inclined her head. Then, unseeingly, she left the place.

One hundred dollars! How long would it last? Long enough, probably, to see Marini through, and that was all that mattered. Besides, she still had most of her

original thirty dollars. Her spirits mounted, then sank. She must go back to her work and explain to Kate Martin why she was late. When the explanation was made Miss Martin was unresponsive.

"I've got to dock you twenty-five cents, you understand," was all she said. "That's the rule." Personal affairs, the vital crises of life and death, are nothing to the Miss Martins of the world.

That night Marini was much worse. On the way up to her room Barbara heard her short, gasping breaths. But she could speak, and her face brightened at the entrance of her visitor—that face which had changed so suddenly and so terribly.

"Good," she whispered, patting Barbara's hand. "All good."

Her glance included the nurse, the changed aspect of the room, from which the superfluous furniture had been removed, to stand in the outer hall. There was comfort here, and hygiene and science. Warm, clean blankets wrapped her round.

"Good," repeated Marini, patting Barbara's hand. It was at once her recognition and her thanks.

The next day oxygen-tanks were brought in, and the third day a special night nurse came. The week dragged by. Barbara spent every moment of her own time in the sick-room, into which the cold fresh air poured from the two wide-open windows. She was the god in Marini's machine, and no one disputed her place. Other friends called, French, Italian, and American friends who had read in the newspapers of the singer's illness; but by the doctor's orders no one entered the sick-room but himself, the nurses, the specialist he had consulted, and Mees Smeeth.

The ninth day of Marini's illness happened to fall on Saturday, when Barbara's time, from three o'clock on, was her own. As she passed the desk of the Garibaldi's host he sadly shook his head.

"Things are not going well up there," he said.

She was not surprised. Things had not been going well for several days. When she entered the sick-chamber her heart missed a beat. The face that turned toward her as the door opened no longer seemed Marini's. The skin was drawn tight around the mouth and nostrils; the eyes were dull and sunk far back in the head. But as she drew near the sick woman's lips twitched in an approach to the old smile.

"Good," she gasped.

Barbara drew a low stool close to her and took her hand. "Good," said Marini again, more faintly, and closed her eyes. The eyes of the visitor sent a question to the nurse at the head of the couch. The latter shook her head.

"The doctor?" Barbara's lips noiselessly formed the words.

"Three times to-day. He has just left. Dr. Herrick came, too. She had extreme unction this morning. You know she is a Catholic."

Barbara had not known, though she should have known.

A silence fell over the room—a strange, deep silence, broken only by the gasping breath of the woman on the bed. The hotel itself was very still. Other guests on that floor had been asked to be quiet. The elevator's cables had been freshly oiled. Its door opened and shut noiselessly. Every one was considering Marini, whose soul was unfolding its wings for its last flight.

Holding the dying hand close in her own, Barbara stared through the open windows at the patch of gray sky beyond them. A few scattered snowflakes whirled outside and drifted into the room across the window-ledge. The sky darkened. The room grew dim. From a side-street far below the notes of a catarrhal hand-organ rose to her.

Marini stirred and muttered. Barbara quieted her with a soothing touch of her other hand. Her right hand felt cramped. The hand that held it was clinging almost desperately to this last link in the human chain. As millions of others have done before her, the watcher reflected on the strangeness of life, on the incredible turn of the wheel which placed her, of all the persons in the world, at Marini's death-bed. Surely there must be many who had stronger claims, many who still loved the old artiste. Possibly they had been here at the hotel, beating vainly against the barriers the doctors had set up.

Marini opened her eyes. Barbara bent toward her.

"Dear madame," she said, speaking very distinctly, "is there any one you wish me to send for? Any one you care to see?"

Twice the singer tried to speak. The third time the word came. "No," she said. Her grasp tightened on Barbara's hand. "Good," she muttered.

The room grew dark. The nurse lit a lamp which merely threw up the somber shadows of the place. The night nurse came, then the doctor. The day nurse remained. Barbara heard the three whispering together in the hall. The doctor came in and stood at the foot of the bed, his eyes on his patient's graying face. Once he spoke to her, loudly and clearly.

"Are you very tired, dear madame?" he asked.

But the ears of the singer were closed. Soon she began to mutter, in French, in Italian. The lights were not right, she said. They should be all on—all. The doctor signaled to the nurse. An electric light blazed up, but Marini gasped on. It was dark, she said, too dark. She opened wide, straining eyes and stared about the room. They fell on Barbara's face and their expression changed. The look of strain died out of them. For the last time, very feebly, she pressed the girl's hand.

"Good," she gasped, and tried to smile. The hand in Barbara's grew heavy.

The doctor came forward and made a swift examination. "It is over," he said. "She did not suffer."

It was not yet nine o'clock when Barbara left the Garibaldi. She had thought of everything; she had given instructions for every contingency; she had arranged the details of the funeral. As she walked away she felt a hundred years old, but she moved rapidly, a sudden purpose in her soul. In ten minutes she was in the Parkview, receiving an almost paternal greeting from Hendrick.

"Hendrick," she said, "I want to telephone to Mr. Warren. You have his number, haven't you?"

Hendrick led her to the telephone-desk and called up the number. Almost immediately Warren's voice came over the wire. The great relief of hearing it brought to Barbara's eyes the first tears of the day. She had been horribly afraid of not finding him in his rooms. In spite of her efforts to keep it steady, her voice trembled when she spoke.

"Mr. Warren," she said, "this is Miss Smith. I am at the Parkview."

He uttered an exclamation.

"Please listen. I would like to see you. Can you come over at once? I will wait in the reception-room."

"I'll be there within ten minutes," he said, quietly.

She hung up the receiver with a sigh of relief. Here was a man after her own heart. She had hardly time to plan how she would put what she had to say to him before he was facing her, impetuous, eager-eyed, holding both her hands.

"Please sit down," she begged, "and don't interrupt. I'm going to tell you the whole story."

He listened in silence while she did so.

"You see, I need your help," she ended. "I have some money left, but it won't pay all the bills of the illness and funeral. I must give her the kind of funeral she would like. So"—never before had she asked a favor such as this—"will you lend me some money until next October? I can repay it then, very easily."

"Let me take charge of the whole thing," he begged. "Won't you? *Please* do!"

"No. But I will borrow what I need from you. And will you stand by and help me with the arrangements? Someway," gulped Barbara, "my nerves seem to be going to pieces."

She was in tears. Warren, looking at her, begged his soul to stand fast. It obeyed him. He did not even take her hand.

"We will do everything together," he said, very gently. "As to standing by, I'll be your shadow. I will call for you the first thing in the morning, and we'll go to the

hotel. But now I'm going to give you some supper, and then take you home. You have been under a big nervous strain, and you're feeling the effects of it. Any one would."

He made her eat an oyster stew in a quiet hotel near the Parkview, the same he had recommended on the night of their first meeting. Then she let him order a taxicab and leave her at the door of her lodgings.

"Thank Heaven, you can't hide from me hereafter," he said, devoutly. "You've got to promise now always to let me know where you are."

"Always?" Barbara had revived a little.

Their eyes held.

"Always," he repeated, firmly.

"I will think that over. Good night."

Thanks to the efforts of Mr. Warren, the newspapers had accurate accounts of Marini's death. The old singer had died after a short illness, at the Garibaldi, close upon her triumph at the Mason Theater, the week before. Her funeral would take place at the little Church of Santa Maria, where a solemn requiem mass would be sung.

The response of Marini's old associates was immediate. Masses of flowers came to the Garibaldi and to the church, and Barbara arranged them in both places as the prima donna would have wished. Several of the artistes of the Metropolitan Opera House forces offered to sing. Musical societies sent representatives to volunteer their services, and on the morning of the funeral the beautiful church was crowded to the walls, while hundreds watched in the street outside.

Barbara, listening to the wonderful voice of the Metropolitan's greatest contralto, told herself again that this whole experience must be a dream. Dream-like the incense that filled her nostrils, with the heavy scent of the flowers on every side; dream-like the men and women kneeling here in honor to Marini, who had lived forgotten by them and had died almost alone; dream-like the memory of the singer, and the long shining case before the altar—the case from whose sinister outline the beautifying flowers had for the time been stripped, according to the rule of the church; dream-like the beauty of the mass, the figures of priests and acolytes; dream-like the little sob here and there—the sob of some emotional woman who had known Marini.

But not dream-like this living figure by her side, the man who rose and knelt when she did, and who for the past three days had been what he had promised to be, her shadow. Three months ago she had not known that he was in the world. Now, for the moment at least, he seemed the only living thing in it.

A hand touched her arm.

"Come," whispered Warren.

Marini was starting on her last journey, down the aisle of the church, borne on the shoulders of eight of her countrymen. Barbara took her place in the procession that followed. Through the veil she wore she saw the surpliced figures of the priests, the pressing back of the congregation from the crowded aisle, heard the throb of dying organ tones, saw the hats leave the heads of the waiting assemblage in the street.

Yes, it had all been done as Barbara Devon would have done it in the old days; and as Marini would have wished

it done. Marini, if she could have spoken, would have pronounced it "Good."

"Where now?" asked Warren.

Barbara came to herself with a start. They had left the huge, desolate cemetery of Calvary behind them, and were driving along the country road on their way to the Long Island ferry.

"Home."

"Lunch first," suggested Warren. "Then I will take you home."

"No," said Barbara. "I must rush home and change, and then go back to work. You see, I have only half a day off. I've got to address six hundred envelopes this afternoon."

Warren muttered something under his breath. Barbara, fortunately, did not catch the words.

"I want to stay home," she confessed. "I want to stay and turn my face to the wall." She added a bit of Sonya's philosophy, and as she spoke she understood for the first time all that it meant. "You see, when one has a job one must either work at it or give it up," she ended.

Barbara had mastered the primer lesson in Life's Book of Business.

XI

LAURIE FINDS AN OPEN DOOR

THE optimism of Lawrence Devon, never great, was sorely tried in the month that followed his arrival in New York.

Characteristically, during his first week in the city, he selected bachelor quarters of such comfort and elegance that he could not afford to remain in them the second week. Like his sister, young Devon had no real comprehension of the value of money. From these quarters he had gloomily moved into a room which, according to the enthusiastic prediction of his landlady, would supply him with hot and cold water, heat, and light.

But these promises, so fair and so confidingly accepted, were not fulfilled. Though the October days were chilling, the steam heat was not turned on, the hot water was always cold, and the illumination was merely a glim oozing from the microscopic point of a gas-jet especially made for the protection of landladies. Before Lawrence could complain too bitterly, he realized that even these modified comforts were beyond his emptying purse. His capital of fifty dollars was melting like a snowball in the sun, and though he spent an honest eight hours of each day in search of employment, it seemed clear that the busy world held no work for him.

He was spared one of the embarrassments attending his former efforts; he was no longer tolerated as an expensive bit of furniture in handsome offices. But he was now subject to the ready contempt of the democratic soul for "good clothes" and "the Harvard manner." Indeed his wardrobe handicapped him to such an extent that at the end of a fortnight he exchanged an expensive morning suit for certain ready-to-wear garments that drew from the cold eyes of the woman of the house the first glint of approval they had yet held when they rested on him.

But even this radical step did not get him a job. No one else seemed to admire the new clothes, and he soon discarded them. As to work, he had had no experience, and he had no references. Faces which in the beginning were merely patient or impatient hardened into suspicion when these lacks were revealed.

He had begun with a certain ambition, and had gone on with considerable courage. He had had his days of thinking the whole thing a very good joke, and he had found mental diversion in making plans for the spending of his ten thousand dollars when he got it. Surely any fellow could follow a rainbow with such a pot of gold at its foot!

But it grew harder to hold to faith or courage as the weeks passed and his small fund still shrank under his finger-tips. The only sound in his world seemed to be the sound of closing doors. Sometimes a nod went with it, sometimes a brusque "Good day." Occasionally a man would be stirred by a philanthropic impulse, caused by the growing discouragement in the eyes of a handsome boy. But it was still-born. The inexperienced are

heavy burdens, and most of these men were already carrying on their shoulders the weight of one or two incompetents. This fellow was well dressed and looked well fed, they reflected. Let some one else give him a leg up.

On one occasion, quite unknowingly, Laurie aroused one of these sporadic impulses in a breast that had already vibrated to his sister's need. Warren, lunching one day in a popular down-town restaurant near his office, found himself next to a table occupied by a stranger who seemed out of his element in the busy place.

The stranger was a young man—a very elegant young man, and an extraordinarily good-looking young man; but neither of these qualities would have attracted Warren's attention. He himself was well dressed and well bred. But in the first moment his eyes fell on this particular youth he had an impression that he knew him—an impression so strong that he almost nodded. Know him? Of course he knew him. But for the moment he had forgotten who the chap was. He must have known him rather well, too. His eyes, that quick turn of his head, seemed so familiar. When— Where—

The waiter at the stranger's elbow dropped the match he was holding for the patron's cigarette, and profusely apologized. The young man smiled, and at the smile Warren straightened. He knew now who this youth was like. Or did he? Was he, Warren, so obsessed by one image that he saw it everywhere? It seemed quite possible.

His luncheon came, and he turned to it with alacrity. He did not know the chap. He rather wished he did. Then he forgot him in the satisfying joy of a good meal.

Half an hour later a continuous rustle aroused him from a revery over his coffee and cigar.

His neighbor, the young man who for a fleeting moment had looked like Her, was almost hidden behind a pile of newspapers which, evidently, he had ordered brought to his table. He was going over them one by one—not reading them, Warren observed, but examining the advertising pages of each. Through the haze of his cigar smoke Warren lazily watched him.

In each case it was the "Help Wanted" column his neighbor selected. He pored over it closely, ponderingly, and from time to time he made notes. It was not difficult to infer that the elegant young man was looking for a job. He seemed not yet in dire need of one. His clothes were as good and as well made as Warren's clothes. His tie was a marvel of soft, rich, and expensive beauty. He had eaten a fair luncheon and he was smoking a good cigarette. At intervals he consulted a penciled list, checking off certain addresses which, Warren inferred, he had visited that morning, and adding new addresses just copied from the newspapers. It was clear that he was rather anxious. He read and made notes with corrugated brow, and Warren suddenly decided that he had been mistaken about that resemblance. If it had been there at all, it was gone.

The stranger looked up and, catching Warren's unconscious stare, which immediately became apologetic, smiled good-humoredly. The two men were facing each other, with only the width of their small tables between them. They might almost have been at the same table. Warren returned the smile.

"I admire your industry," he commented, nodding toward the communicating trench of newspapers.

The young man—he seemed almost a boy—laughed rather consciously. "I haven't had much chance to show it yet," he jested. "But I hope to, soon."

He was a college boy, Warren decided, probably making his first flight out into the world. "Making a start?" he asked.

"Trying to."

"What's your line?"

"I haven't any. That's the trouble."

It did not seem to trouble the youth at this moment. He was again smiling his brilliant, boyish smile, and Warren, as he watched it, felt a familiar pang. It *was* a bit like hers! He yielded to an unusual impulse. He would give this attractive boy half an hour.

"Suppose you move over to my table and tell me about it," he suggested.

The stranger did not hesitate. He came with an alacrity which hinted that he had been rather lonely. It seemed, also, to give him pleasure to forget the newspapers.

"Awfully good of you," he said, seating himself across from Warren and lighting a fresh cigarette. "This big town of yours is a lonesome town if a man's a stranger in it. I've been here three weeks, and I don't know any one yet."

Warren nodded sympathetically. "I've had the feeling myself," he admitted. "Not in New York, but in other places. My name is Warren," he added.

"Mine is—Jones." There was the slightest possible hesitation over the name—so slight that Warren was not

sure it had existed at all. He smiled to himself. It was his hour for Smiths and Joneses.

"You'll feel at home after a few days," he promised, comfortingly, "when you've settled down into the new job."

"Y-e-s, if I get the job," the young man agreed. The lines in his brow reappeared. "You see," he went on, candidly, "it's rather absurd, my looking for a job—because I wouldn't be of much use to any one."

"No experience?"

"Nothing that counts—and no training. That's the worst of it. It takes nerve to come into New York with a record like that and ask for money."

Warren laughed. "Oh, I don't know. Lots of men with that record are drawing salaries."

He recalled one or two in his own offices, and the philanthropic impulse toward this attractive stranger died even as it was born. Warren was a broker, still in the early stages of the long, up-hill climb that led to fortune.

"You'll catch on to something," he predicted, easily. "One always does. The town is full of millionaires who spent their first days here sitting on our park benches and staring at the fringe on their trousers."

"That's comforting." The boy smiled. "For I'm all on my own. I've got to sink or swim without yelling for help."

"H-m-m! That makes it a bit harder."

Warren studied him thoughtfully, and privately decided that while this youth might not go to the wall, he had not the stamina of one who could be expected to do big things.

As if he felt something critical in the quiet scrutiny

of the man who could not be half a dozen years older than himself, young Jones flushed. Then he rose and held out his hand. "Good-by," he said. "I must be off."

"Wait a minute. I'm going, too."

Warren paid his check, and left the restaurant with his new acquaintance. They walked toward Broadway in silence.

"I've always thought," said Warren at last, "that it would be mighty interesting to meet life single-handed, and see what you got out of it. I suppose it's really the only way a man can learn what stuff he's made of. Personally, I don't know much about it. I've always been given 'a leg up.'"

"So have I, till now." The young man, stopping at the first corner, held out his hand again, this time in definite farewell. "I'm taking a car here," he explained.

"Then good-by. Good luck. And, by the way"—Warren found a card and handed it over—"look me up some time."

"Thanks. I will."

They shook hands, and Warren, glancing after young Jones, saw him catch a passing car by the elbow, as it were, and swing easily onto the platform, to the severe disapproval of the conductor. Five minutes later, back in his office, the little encounter had faded from the New York man's mind.

As the weeks passed, Laurie was attacked by enemies within his gates. His self-indulged young body clamored for the excitements it was used to. The gloomier his financial outlook became the more imperatively his nerves demanded the stimulation of cards, of wine, of all those

things he had in honor bound himself to forego for a year.

Again and again he fought his fight, invariably precipitated when he was most tired, most depressed. He fought it on the streets, so crowded, yet so empty. He fought it on park benches, sitting with other failures who looked much as he himself felt. Most of all, he fought it in his wretched room, during the endless evenings. He could not be on the streets all the time, and he had no money for even the moving-picture shows. But in certain card-rooms he knew, places into which he had been initiated during former visits to New York, he was sure he could stake his last few dollars and win enough to tide him over for a month or two.

His craving for drink was another revelation. A thousand times he had claimed that he could stop drinking any day he wanted to, and he had made the claim sincerely. Well, he could, but with the penalty of tying his entire nervous system into hard knots. At such times the ten thousand dollars awaiting him next October seemed nothing. The experiment seemed an incredible folly. All he wanted in the world was to get gloriously drunk and forget the whole damned business.

But he had given his word—and even in these crises that meant something. What meant more was that somewhere in the big city the sister to whom he had given it was making a fight of her own, different but possibly as hard in its way as his.

One night the inspiration came to him to write about the case of the stranger who batters vainly at New York's gate, and an hour later he had carried it out. It had been surprisingly easy to do so. The thing poured forth in an

almost joyous fashion, for he had had the wisdom to describe his experiences very simply and naturally, as if he were writing to Barbara.

The effort exhilarated him. He thought the article very good, but of course he did not know whether it was salable. There was, however, a simple method of finding out. The next morning he took the manuscript to the office of a Sunday newspaper and asked to see the editor. There followed half an hour of anxious waiting in an anteroom, under the critical regard of an office-boy. Then he was admitted to an inner room, in which several shirt-sleeved young men were impressively at work at large and littered desks.

He approached them respectfully. It was a moment in his life. He liked the looks of these chaps—their alertness, their clever, tired faces. He saw himself telling them how he got his material, and possibly outlining the plan of a second story that had occurred to him. One of the young men glanced at him obliquely, and he accepted this as permission to speak.

"I've written a special article," he began, "which I—"

"Leaveitwe'llwritechewboutit," remarked the young man, taking the manuscript from the visitor's hand. His companions in the room did not even glance up.

"How soon—"

"Twothreedays."

"My address—"

"S'hereisn'tit? S'allright."

The interview was over. Lawrence found himself in the outer hall, gazing pensively down an elevator shaft and reflecting on the value of time. He had heard about that all his life, but he had never had so arresting an illus-

tration of its truth. He looked at his watch. His encounter with the newspaper editor had taken exactly one minute and a quarter. But it had been a full minute and a quarter. For several hours afterward he felt the nervous strain of it.

That night, sitting on the bed in the rear room on the top floor of a lodging-house to which he had finally descended, he devoted himself to what he mentally classified as his "favorite indoor sport." He counted his money and, finding the result disappointing, he counted it again. He had been right the first time. He had been in New York six weeks, and, thanks to his easeful life during the first week, there remained of his capital exactly four dollars and eighty cents.

Bitterly he recalled things he had done, money he had spent on chops for breakfast, even on grape-fruit. Of course there were things he could pawn—his clothes, his watch, things that would bring enough to keep him going another month or so. But after they were gone, what? A slow, unpleasant chill crept the length of the boy's spine. For the first time in his life he was afraid.

He rose, went to the one window of his room, and looked down somberly on the back yards that lay below it. They were unattractive back yards, with clothes-lines in them, and bulky shapes which even in the November darkness revealed themselves as the outlines of ash-barrels and garbage-cans.

A wave of homesickness rolled over his soul. He was a permanent failure; he knew it now—an utterly hopeless failure, to whom no effort, no turn of the wheel, could bring success. That being so, why prolong the agony of this experiment? Why not crawl home, borrow money

from his friends, open up the house, and wait for Barbara? It would be a wait, he knew—for, whatever her experience might be, Barbara would not come home. Barbara would see it through.

A slow flush stole up to Laurie's forehead and he swore at himself under his breath. His weakness, his despair, gave place to resolution. He set his teeth. All right, he told himself, he would see it through, too. Whatever came, he would see it through—if it killed him.

Somewhere in the house a child was crying, loudly and angrily. The sound, and Laurie's absorption in his troubles, prevented him from hearing a knock on his door. It was repeated twice; then the visitor opened the door and thrust his head around the side of it.

"Any one home?" he asked.

In the light of the one gas-jet Laurie recognized the head as belonging to a youth he had met several times in the halls and on the stairs—a youth several years older than himself, with upstanding reddish hair, pink, clean-shaven cheeks, and the wide smile of a friendly bulldog. There was something of the bulldog, too, in the set of his jaw and in his firm, stocky figure. As Laurie went toward him he swung the door wide, shouldered his way into the room as if he were sweeping aside unseen obstacles, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Don't mind my breezing in, do you?" he inquired, catching Laurie's hand in a grip that threatened to crush it, and dropping it as suddenly as he had taken it. "The truth is, I came to ask you something."

"Glad to see you," said Laurie. "You live here in the house, don't you?"

"Yes, on the second floor. My name's Bangs—Rodney Bangs."

"Mine is Jones. Sit down, Mr. Bangs, and fire when ready."

Bangs sat down on the one chair the room offered, but he seemed to experience some difficulty in firing. Instead he was silent for an instant, staring with bright brown eyes at his host, who had dropped into an easy position on the side of the bed.

"Will you smoke?" invited Laurie, bringing out his cigarette-case. As the other made an instinctive movement of assent, he rose, and, crossing to his guest's side, lit a match and held it until the end of the cigarette was burning.

The episode seemed to inspire Bangs. When the host had returned to his seat on the bed he went to the point of his visit.

"That's the kind of thing I'm here for," he said, bluntly.

Laurie stared. "A cigarette?"

"No. The things that go with it—the way you do things."

"I don't quite understand—"

"Of course you don't, but you're going to. Got half an hour to spare?"

"Yes, of course."

"All right, then. Here goes."

Bangs settled himself more firmly on the protesting chair, took the cigarette out of his mouth, and for a moment stared thoughtfully at the ash on the end of it, his burnished pompadour a high light in the dim room.

"Have you ever written anything?" he asked.

Laurie recalled his solitary venture. "Yes, a little," he admitted—"for the newspapers."

Bangs nodded. "Good. Then you'll understand. I'm writing a play."

Laurie looked at him with respect and a growing interest.

"It's a 'crook play,'" Bangs went on. "I can write that kind of thing because I know the life. I'm not a crook myself, but I've made a study of the underworld and I've got a big situation. It's almost too good to be true, but it is true, just the same. The play is about done, and I'm pretty well satisfied with it. It's darned good, if I do say it, and I've got a manager who has practically promised it a try-out. But one thing bothers me a lot, and it suddenly occurred to me that perhaps you could help me."

"I'll be very glad to if I can," said Laurie, simply.

He liked Bangs, liked him quite surprisingly. He was grateful to him, also, for interrupting his own black mood and giving him in its place a sense of companionship.

"Most of the characters are crooks," continued Bangs, without acknowledging the interruption; "but there's one act in a big country house with characters that are supposed to be ladies and gentlemen—the real thing. That scene is what I'm up against."

Lawrence nodded and waited for more light.

"I don't know how they'd act," ended Bangs, with unconscious pathos. "I don't know what they'd say."

The host approached him cautiously over the thin ice that stretched between them. "You mean you can't work up the situation?"

"Hell, no!" said Mr. Bangs. "I can work up any situa-

tion. I know what I *want* 'em to say and do, all right. The only point is, how would they say and do it? What I mean is, I haven't got the society stuff doped out, because I don't know anything about society. And I don't want those devils of critics to catch on and roast me for it, as they did in Chicago," he added, somberly.

"Oh!" Laurie's respect for the little chap mounted. "Then you've done plays before?"

"Of course. Didn't I tell you my name's Rodney Bangs?" The playwright looked pained. He mentioned the titles of two plays of which Laurie had never heard. "They did mighty well on the road, and they're still going in 'stock' out West. But they never got into New York," he added, honestly. "I'm breaking into New York with this play. Epstein's going to put it on."

"Has he signed the contract?"

"No, but that doesn't matter. Managers are as unreliable when they sign as when they don't sign. Mighty few of 'em live up to a contract unless they're making money on it. They break it as if it was a cracker. But Epstein will take this, all right. He was looking for a big crook play all last season. I've read it to him and promised to make some changes, and he's telephoned twice asking when they'll be ready. I've got him going! I've promised to read the new stuff to him to-morrow afternoon, but I'm stuck."

"On the big scene?"

"Lord, no! How many times must I tell you? On the society dope. So that," he added, calmly, "is where you come in. You're going to help me out."

"Oh!"

Bangs drew his chair forward and laid a trustful hand

on Laurie's knee. "You see, I can't go to any of the theatrical bunch," he added, urgently. "I can't afford to admit to them that there's anything *I* don't know. If I did, it would queer me. See? But the first time I saw you on the stairs I said to myself: 'That chap knows the ropes. He's got the look of it.' I didn't dare to speak then. I was afraid you'd think I was pretty fresh. But I asked the landlady who you were, and I've been thinking things over. It struck me that as you're out of a— I mean, that as you have extra time on your hands just now— Say," he broke off, suddenly, "I'm making a devil of a mess of this!"

Laurie laughed. "Not at all. You're making everything very clear." He felt sorry for the cocksure little chap, whose cocksureness had so abruptly left him. "Suppose you read the play to me," he added. "When we get to the act that bothers you, I will make any suggestions that occur to me."

"You're on." Bangs rose with a sigh of relief. "Come down to my diggings," he added. "The stuff's there."

They descended two flights of stairs and entered a comfortable front room, whose principal ornaments were a large flat writing-table, a typewriter, and a sideboard containing a decanter, siphons, glasses, and a box of cigars. An added and unexpected comfort was a coal fire, burning on the small hearth of a narrow, old-fashioned fireplace. Bangs waved a casual paw that took in the sybaritic scene.

"Sort of stage setting," he explained. "I don't often bother about a fire. But to-night it occurred to me that if I had one to look at while I wrote, and if I got up occasionally and mixed myself a whisky and soda, I'd

feel sort of like the real thing." He sighed. "It didn't work," he ended.

Laurie dropped into a chair and fixed a severe gaze upon the fire. This was not the time to laugh, but the muscles of his mouth twitched longingly. He accepted a cigar from the box Bangs offered him, and without either reluctance or hope settled himself to listen to what he believed would be at best a raw melodrama.

Bangs picked up the typewritten first act of his play and began to read it aloud. All his nervousness had left him. He was cool, confident, and business-like. He outlined his stage setting in a few words, but so vividly that the hearer instantly visualized it, and in ten minutes more the latter had entered a somber and sinister world which was as new to him as it was absorbing. Laurie knew nothing of the technique or construction of plays, but if cumulative interest was the test, Bangs's first act was a winner. As the curtain went down he recalled himself with regret to his immediate surroundings.

"But I say, that's good!" he exclaimed, in unflattering surprise. "Why, it's most awfully good!"

"Of course it's good. I know that. What I want is criticism. Got any?"

"There was one point I noticed. I don't know much about plays, except that they're good or bad, but this was a matter of character. Do you think your chap would have put things just as he did in that second scene, with the girl? Wouldn't he have hedged more?"

They disputed the point heatedly for five minutes. Then Bangs made a note on his manuscript.

"By George! you're right!" he admitted. "I knew it the minute you spoke, but I wanted you to get off

all that was on your chest. Let's have a drink on this."

Laurie shook his head. "Water-wagon," he confessed.

"Good boy. Settles that."

Laurie liked the way he had taken the confession, and liked it none the less because he realized that at least fifty per cent. of Bangs's tolerance came from a fervid wish to get back to his play. "Now for the second act," the author said, at once.

He read it, and read it well. Laurie began to understand the impatience of the eager Epstein. He made a suggestion or two, and they raced into the third act. But this, which should have been the big act of the play, went more slowly. Bangs had lost his certainty of touch. He was on unknown ground and his assurance had deserted him; yet to Laurie the solution of his trouble seemed very simple.

"You're off there, Bangs," he said, when the act was finished.

"Don't I know it?" The playwright drooped despondently. Even his brilliant pompadour seemed to have lost its spring. "It's got me going," he muttered.

"But it's so easy! Why, don't you see?"

Lawrence talked for ten minutes, and Bangs listened in absolute silence. But his face, dark with anxiety at first, brightened slowly until it lit the place like a rising moon. When the visitor stopped he drew a deep breath, rose solemnly, and wrung the other's hand. Then, dropping his mantle of dignity, he cut the extravagant caper of an exuberant small boy.

"We've got it!" he yelped. "It's as clear as spring water! I'll rewrite that act to-night!"

Laurie rose to go, but the host stretched out an arm and pushed him back into his chair.

"Wait a minute," he said. "We've got something to settle. You've given me expert advice." He thrust his hand into a pocket of his trousers and drew out a roll of bills. "How much?" he asked, simply.

Laurie flushed. "My dear fellow," he began.

As the playwright's shining eyes clouded, he rose and clapped him on the shoulder.

"We're quits," he said. "I've enjoyed your play immensely, and I've had the time of my life advising you. Why, Bangs, no one has ever taken my advice before, though I've offered it freely to all comers. So you see what you have done for me? When the play is on, you can send me a pair of seats. Good night."

He was at the door. Bangs followed him.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "I've got another idea. I need a secretary!"

Laurie swung around and faced him, suspicion in his soul. "See here, confound you!" he jerked out. "Are you trying to help me?" Under the utter stupefaction in the other's face he stopped, wishing that he could swallow the words.

"Help the devil!" said Bangs, rudely. "I wouldn't stop to drag my father out from under a trolley-car till this infernal play is off my mind. I can't think of anything else. But, say, I'll tell you what I'll do." He was a young man of one idea. He rushed on joyously: "I'll give you a stake in the play. They'll want it all done over during rehearsals; they always do. And the first thing I know they'll have me balled up again. Stand by till it's on, and I'll give you—let's see—" He thought a

second. "I'll give you ten per cent. of my royalties," he added, triumphantly. "Come back here. Let's figure it up." He swept Laurie into a seat, closed his eyes, and set his brain to work. "Let's see," he mused, "I'll get five per cent. on the first five thousand—gross weekly receipts, of course; seven per cent. on the next two thousand; and ten per cent. of all gross weekly receipts above seven thousand. That means that if we play to seven thousand a week in New York—and we've got to, for they don't keep on a play that doesn't—I'll get three hundred and ninety dollars a week, and you'll get thirty-nine dollars. Generous, ain't I? If we play to ten thousand a week, I'll get six hundred and ninety dollars, and you'll get sixty-nine. Believe me, boy, it will come handy, added to what you've got."

It would. Laurie thought of his four dollars and eighty cents.

"But I'm afraid I couldn't earn it," he protested. "It's very nice to sit in your chair and shoot off my opinions, but it's only fair to warn you that they're no good."

"You'll earn it, all right. You'll read this play over and over till you're sick of the name of it. You'll criticize and question every line of it. You'll have to write the dialogue, when it comes to those society dames. Why, Jones, I'm taking advantage of your youth and innocence. Besides," he added, honestly, "it's only fair to warn you that the play may fail in one night. Then neither of us will get a cent, beyond a little advance from Epstein. It's only a sporting chance I'm offering you." His voice changed. "You aren't working just now, are you?"

"No. I haven't found the right thing, yet."

"Yes, you have. This is the right thing." Bangs exultantly smote him upon the back. Then his mood changed. "It isn't really a square deal," he repeated, "to keep you working on my play all through the rehearsals when perhaps you won't get a cent at the end. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll stake you while we're at it. Move down into this room. Then I can wake you up nights to listen to new scenes, when I'm working. You can have the couch and I'll keep the bed. And I pay the grub bills till the play's on—or off. How about it?"

"I'll think it over," murmured Laurie.

It sounded good, but a bit too good to be true. He would wake up presently. Meantime he would inject a little common sense into the dream.

"No, you won't. I've got to have this thing off my mind. Say, have you ever heard of the artistic temperament? I've got it."

Bangs was holding his arm. At a casual glance he suggested the artistic temperament about as much as a yearling bull would suggest it, till one looked into his brilliant eyes.

"Settle it now," he demanded, urgently. "I've got to have the thing off my mind, so I can go to work."

"All right," agreed Laurie. "But I must have my way about one thing. I'll sleep in my own quarters to-night, and move down in the morning. So long."

They shook hands, and Bangs hurled himself at his desk. Almost before the door was closed Laurie heard the rapid patter of his typewriter.

XII

ENTER MR. EPSTEIN

LAURIE was awakened by an excited voice in his ear. Also, something was violently jerking his arm. He sat up with a word of heartfelt expostulation. The first pale rays of the November sun were falling across his bed, touching on their way the hollow eyes and tousled head of Rodney Bangs. Bangs was dressed as he had been when Laurie left him the night before. In his arms he clasped a bulky manuscript.

"Say, Jones, listen," he said, urgently. "I've finished the act."

"That's good." Laurie rubbed his eyes and yawned.

"You bet it's good. Here, listen! I'm going to read it to you."

"The devil you are! Get out!"

"I've changed the whole thing, just as you suggested. Listen. Enter Holohan—"

"And exit Bangs."

Lawrence rose, grasped Mr. Bangs by the neck, and, to the great surprise and resentment of that temperamental youth, led him to the door and placed him on the other side of it. Then he addressed him paternally.

"Now, little boy," he said, "go down-stairs and make yourself a nicer object for sleepy eyes to rest on. When

we're both dressed and have had a large, nourishing breakfast," he added, firmly, "I'll listen to your little play. But in the mean time I'm going to be an awfully nervous, edgy, temperamental chap myself, so I advise you to clear out quick."

Bangs looked at him, at first with annoyance, then with the beginning of his wide, engaging grin. "All right," he said, obediently, and trotted off down-stairs. "We'll go to breakfast in half an hour," he called back from the first landing.

Laurie dressed in leisurely fashion, humming as he did so. His spirits were high. This was to be a working-day, his first working-day. Moreover, if he read correctly the temperament of his new associate, it would be a strenuous working-day. But it would also be a mighty interesting day. He didn't know when he had looked into the dawn with such admiring eyes. Those literary chaps were sometimes right. There *was* something appealing about work, after all! With which artless reflection he snatched up his hat and went his buoyant way to breakfast.

After that meal, which was a much more deliberate affair than Bangs had intended it to be, Laurie listened to the new scenes in the third act, and, to the deep satisfaction of the playwright, was able, on the whole, to approve of them. He was sure, however, that he could improve certain lines, "make them sound as if the dames said them," as Bangs put it; and by noon he was established on the other side of the big writing-table, facing the author and the typewriter, his pen running a race with his inspiration. Already he was as interested as if the play were his own. Indeed, he soon felt it to be his

own, and he disputed certain details with Bangs as hotly as if he and not that impetuous youth were the playwright. Meantime, he loved the work. If this was work, work was great.

"Do you know," he remarked during a quiet interval, gazing dreamily at his new friend through the haze of tobacco smoke that hung over them both, "I think that some day I'll write a play myself."

"Good boy!" applauded Bangs. "Go to it."

"It will be a society play—a comedy," continued Laurie, "and of course I'll have to study technique and play construction, and read all the good plays I can get hold of. I've always been more interested in plays than in anything else. I wrote plays at college. It never occurred to me to do them seriously, but—I—believe—I could."

"Bet you could," corroborated Bangs. "All you've got to do is to get a big theme."

The reference to the big theme temporarily depressed the amateur. He had overlooked the fact that there had to be a theme.

"It seems very easy," he murmured, defensively.

Bangs smiled at him. "Think so?" was all he said. "Wait till we begin to rehearse."

At five o'clock they were at the office of Epstein, ready to keep the appointment Bangs had made the preceding week. Laurie had felt some hesitation about projecting himself into this vital conference, but Bangs eliminated this with a sweeping gesture.

"Come right along," he urged. "Got to get used to it. Might as well begin. Besides"—he grinned his wide, engaging grin, and the fair-mindedness which was one of

his finest characteristics displayed itself again, as it was so often to do in their relationship—"if Epstein turns me down, you'll be there to see it, and you can get out from under without losing any more time."

They found Epstein in his inner shrine, guarded by a youth of fourteen, who took their cards with an air. It was plain that the producer had cleared the decks for the author; the outer office, usually full of applicants for his attention, was empty, and the two long benches in the anteroom—the "mourners' benches," as the theatrical world called them—were also unoccupied. Epstein, who proved to be a plump Hebrew with a bald head and oblique black eyes, was at his desk when they approached, looking over a model "set" and chilling a tired-eyed young man with the breath of his disfavor.

"You're all wrong," he was saying. "Hear me, Haxon? You're all wrong. Take it away."

He dismissed the man with a gesture and turned to greet the new-comers. Bangs presented his friend, and Epstein took him in with a deep glance of the oblique black eyes.

"Well, let's get to business," he said, waving them toward chairs. "I got half an hour for you, you un-'stand, an' no more."

Laurie wondered. He was not getting from Epstein the effect of tense eagerness Bangs had led him to expect; but the playwright remained unperturbed.

"We'll go right to the new scenes," he said, getting out his manuscript. "You remember the last scene of the second act?"

"Sure I do. It was some scene," admitted Epstein, warming a bit. "You got your work cut out to top it."

He lit a cigar as he spoke, waved a hand toward the box, and leaned back in his swivel chair, ready to listen.

"I've topped it, all right," Bangs assured him, and began to read.

Laurie, who was familiar with modern fiction, rather expected to see Epstein's cigar go out as proof of the listener's interest. It often did in stories, but it did not in Epstein's mouth. He smoked on thoughtfully, his bald head against the top rim of his chair, his oblique eyes gazing at the ceiling. Once or twice he grunted, whether in approval or protest they did not know. At the end of the first scene Bangs looked up inquiringly.

"Go on," said the producer, and the author went on. As Epstein was still silent after the penultimate scene of the third act, Bangs read the final scene to the curtain line. Then, his face a little flushed, he fixed his brown eyes on the listener and waited for the verdict.

Laurie felt his own heart-beats quicken. Epstein seemed lost in thought. He looked at the ceiling, looked out of the window, looked at the handsome Oriental rug at his feet. At last he took his cigar out of his mouth and dreamily addressed it.

"I don't know," he said.

Laurie's heart sank. Bangs grinned.

"I guess p'raps you got somethin'," Epstein went on, "but I ain't sure."

Bangs was coolly exultant. "Oh, I've got something, all right."

"Well, p'raps. Anyway," Epstein told the cigar, "I'll take a chance. But," he turned to Bangs suddenly, his words snapping out, "it's got to have changes, you un'stand."

Rodney's grin widened. "Of course."

"Lots of changes."

"What changes?"

"We talk 'bout that later, after Haxon reads it."

"Mr. Epstein," said Bangs, desperately, "I'd like to direct the putting on of this play myself."

"Don't make me laugh!"

"I'm sure I could—"

"An' I'm sure you couldn't. What experience you got? Ever put on a play in New York?"

"No, but—"

"Ever *get* a play on in New York?"

"No, but—"

"Then you draw in your belt, young man, and watch us go to it. You got an idea; that's 'bout all you got. I ain't goin' to have it spoiled. Haxon puts on the play. You can stick 'round," he added, as he rang the bell.

The office-boy responded.

"Send Haxon here."

Haxon came so promptly that it was clear he had been "sticking 'round." During the interview that followed Laurie formed an impression, afterward confirmed, that Epstein's reliance on Haxon grew in proportion to that sad-eyed gentleman's distance from his side. When Haxon was on the road with a company Epstein sang his praises and withheld judgment of new work until his return. When Haxon was in the Presence, Epstein disputed most of his utterances and killed many of his suggestions.

Epstein wasted no time on ceremony. He held out his hand for the manuscript, and, receiving it from Bangs, handed it over to his director.

"Here's that crook play we talked about," he said. "It's got that one big scene you heard. We got to build it up. Read it to-night and see me in the morning."

Haxon left the room, and Epstein turned to Bangs with an affable nod of dismissal.

"I'll tell you in a day or two if we can get it on this season," he announced.

"But, Mr. Epstein, it's got to go on this season! If it doesn't some one will undercut me. And how about terms, and an advance on royalties?"

Epstein looked pained. "I can't do nothin' about that to-night," he explained, patiently. "Everybody's went home."

"We can agree on the terms." Rodney's jaw set. Some of the sparkle died out of his brown eyes. He repeated the figures he had mentioned to Laurie, and added, firmly: "Five hundred dollars in advance. You ought to give me a thousand."

Epstein held up his hands. Protests sputtered from him like sparks from a short circuit. "I'll give you two hundred and fifty," he said at last.

"No, you won't." Bangs rose. "Sorry, Mr. Epstein. I'd like to do business with you, because I know you would put the play over. But it's five hundred, or the manuscript back. Fortunately, I can afford to wait."

Epstein sighed. "All right," he said, wearily. "I'll send you the contrac' and check in a few days. But, you un'stand, there's got to be a lot done to that play."

Bangs did not seem especially exultant over his victory. As they left the office together he called Laurie's attention to the small boy on guard at Epstein's door.

"See that kid?" he asked, gloomily. "Look at him well."

"Why?"

"Because he'll probably have a lot more to say about my play than I will. When the rehearsals begin he'll tell Epstein what he thinks about it, and Epstein will listen. He'll think it's the voice of the man in the street. He won't listen to me. I'm only the author."

Laurie pressed his arm. "Nonsense!" he said. "This is no time for that kind of talk. Why, man, you've landed your play! It's an occasion for three rousing cheers!"

"It's an occasion for a bully dinner, anyway," admitted Bangs, comforted by the thought. "Come on. Let's go to a gilded hostelry and eat, drink, and be merry—for soon we'll begin to rehearse!"

The contract and Epstein's check for five hundred dollars came a fortnight later, and Bangs, having cashed the check, handed Laurie an impressive roll made up of fifty one-dollar bills. It was his idea of a joke, but Laurie looked at them reverently. They represented the first money he had ever earned, and deep in his soul he considered himself vastly overpaid for what he had done or was still to do on the play. For the hundredth time he told himself that he had fallen on his feet. He had never been so interested in his life.

As if in further proof that his luck had changed, he received from the Sunday newspaper to which he had submitted his first article a check for eight dollars and sixty cents, in full payment for that masterpiece. He had never received an acceptance of the sketch, and no plea for more literature accompanied the check; but during

the next two months he wrote five similar stories of city life, and sold three of them.

He would have given more time to this new industry, whose importance would have seemed so great a few weeks earlier, but he was now very busy on Bangs's play. He was "in" on all the preliminary work; on the consultations with Epstein and Haxon, even on the selection of the cast—for it was decided that rehearsals were to begin at once.

With Bangs and Haxon he went to an up-town theatrical employment agency, and sat in a small inner room watching the procession of actors and actresses who approached and receded from Haxon's temporary desk like breaking waves. Some of the types were superb; some were amusing; others were pathetic; all were interesting.

There was the splendid old actress who could not be engaged because, unlike Laurie, she was *not* "on the wagon." There was the young girl who had had "simply wonderful notices—simply wonderful," and who, when urged to produce a few samples, drew forth a solitary purse-worn scrap from a Western newspaper, mentioning her name. There was the star who had fallen, and the leading man whose feet were slipping because he could not remember his lines; and there were the successes of last season and the failures of this season. But one thing they all had in common—a pride that let no hint escape them of any special need of work. Haxon knew every one and had exactly the right manner for each applicant. Laurie developed a strong admiration for him.

At first "young Jones" felt himself out of place in the various interviews that followed the play's acceptance; but he soon realized that Bangs not only liked his com-

pany, but had an odd pride in showing him off. He was as little of a snob as any man could be; but he plainly gloried in his chum's good looks, his air of breeding, and last, but not least, in his clothes. The final fact was made clear by a rainy-day episode, in which Laurie, indulging a sudden spirit of economy, appeared in the ready-to-wear suit he had bought the month of his arrival. Bangs, who himself was wearing a suit that might have been its brother, stared at his friend with bulging eyes.

"My God, Jones!" he exclaimed, almost in a whisper. "*Where* did you get those clothes?"

When Laurie had explained he shook his head. "Bury 'em," he advised. "They don't go with your type."

Laurie obeyed good-humoredly. His liking for Bangs grew with every day that passed. He was no longer lonely; he had the companionship for which he had unconsciously longed. He liked the little chap's personal neatness, his temperance in the matter of food and drink, his generosity, his tolerance, the excellent physical condition in which he kept himself.

He grew accustomed to Bangs's peculiarities—his outbursts of impatience and quick reactions, his artless egotism, his cocksureness. Bangs's brain, once started in a certain groove, did not stop easily, but kept on running after the signal to cease work had been given it. He was constantly rushing back to his desk after he had left it, making notes of lines and situations, precious and ephemeral. His attitude toward women also interested his co-worker.

"Haven't had time to think of 'em yet," he admitted, with his wide grin. "When I have, watch me pick a winner!"

It soon appeared that he had never drunk much; and now, explaining that it was "no fun to drink alone," he became as abstemious as Laurie. In Bangs's world there was but one thing—his play; and Laurie, lifted to that world by Rodney's inexhaustible energy, found that it was a place strangely lacking in the old temptations which had tortured him. They tried to enter it, but rarely and with decreasing force. He had the better of them; and with the growing certainty that this was so, the boy's whole attitude toward life changed. He did not analyze the change; he did not even fully realize that it had taken place. He only knew that for the first time since his childhood he was at peace with the world—that he was busy and happy and clean.

Rehearsals, when they began, taught him so much that, as he admitted to Bangs, he could feel his brain bulge. True to his resolution, he was reading and studying the technique of the drama, aided by crumbs of wisdom that dropped from the professional tables of Epstein and Haxon. Now he saw a company at work, and, as the situation developed before him, his excitement was equaled only by his surprise. That each member of the cast had to be told by Haxon exactly when and where to move was to Laurie an overwhelming revelation. The indifferent manner in which at first they read their lines upset all his ideas.

He learned that when the leading lady kissed the leading man in a moment of relaxation in the wings, or dropped languidly on the knee of the "heavy," she was not revealing an abyss in her moral nature.

He learned that Epstein really knew nothing whatever about the play, and had taken it on the strength of its one

big, unusual situation; and that Haxon knew a great deal about it and was quietly developing its possibilities.

He learned that Bangs could slip into the wings, and, working on an overturned box, under a solitary bunch-light, could write in a few minutes a new scene for which Haxon waited, as it were, with extended palm.

He learned that he himself was strangely gifted in a similar way. Haxon could inject a demand into his mental slot and pull out a brief dialogue.

He learned how temperamental are the men and women of the stage—how patiently they will endure ten or twelve hours of rehearsing, how unexpectedly they will develop an attack of hysteria which for the moment ends all work.

He learned more about Bangs—his good humor, his unfailing patience, his understanding of the company's difficulties.

"All theatrical people hate an author," he confided to Laurie. "In their opinion, an author is the lowest form of animal life!"

But the members of his company did not hate Bangs. He won them at the first rehearsal, with his engaging, boyish grin, and by his consideration for them and the alertness of his brain. They saw him write, rewrite, and re-rewrite his play. They saw him change situations, throw out scenes, eliminate characters—all at the terse commands of Epstein and the sad-eyed Haxon.

"Don't *re*fer to nothin'; show it *hap*penin'," was Epstein's big rule of the drama—and his efforts to carry it out had sent several promising young playwrights into sanitariums. The ladies and gentlemen who were rehearsing Bangs's play saw their playwright lose weight

and grow hollow-eyed as he tried to follow it—but they never saw him "rattled," even on one occasion when Epstein showed a temperamental impulse to change his pet "crook play" into a drama of high society.

Through it all, Bangs never lost his grin, though sometimes Laurie could have wept when he looked at it. He himself was doing all he could, working like a galley slave, saving the nerves of Bangs in every possible way. Haxon learned that he could get quicker results by making his suggestions through "young Jones." Laurie had a way of putting them, of making them seem easy to carry out. Epstein, too, liked "young Jones," and did not object to his "sticking 'round."

"Say, young fella, is your name really Jones—jus' Jones?" he asked on one occasion.

"Just Jones," replied Laurie, "mellowed by the beautiful name of Lawrence."

Epstein said no more, but it was clear that he had been awakened from a dream.

Occasionally the producer, who frequently dropped in to watch the rehearsals after the first fortnight, was moved to favor young Jones with a few uplifting reflections on the American drama. One of these Laurie never forgot. Tilted back in his orchestra chair, with his cigar emerging from his mouth at an acute angle, Epstein was gloomily regarding the work of his company. It was one of his temperamental days—a day when, as Bangs put it, he wasn't quite sure whether he wanted the play a three-act farce or a five-act tragedy written in blank verse.

"There ain't no beauty in the modern plays," volunteered Epstein, suddenly, "and there ain't no charm.

But it ain't the playwright's fault. D'ye want t' know why it is?"

Laurie admitted that he did.

"It's because," ended Epstein, solemnly, "our theaters has fell into the hands of common and ignorant men!"

The rehearsals ran their customary course. The company went to pieces and pulled itself together again. At the special rehearsal for Epstein, several of the players forgot their lines and the drama of the play crumbled like a decaying wall, while the producer grunted despairingly. To Laurie the world had become a place in which Bangs's play was being produced. Nothing else could be happening, or if it was it didn't matter.

Occasionally a thought of Barbara touched the surface of his mind. But he was sure she was all right; and, anyway, he would see her in a few days, for Christmas was very near. Was the play all right? That was the question. To Laurie, the play was the thing.

XIII

RODNEY BANGS ARRIVES

THE secret of the great fascination of rehearsals Laurie could not explain. He only knew that to be away from them, with the knowledge that they were goining on without him, made him astonishingly irritable and nervous. Again and again, sitting in the cold wings of the ill-lighted stage, feeling severely critical of the leading lady's languor and blue nose, of the general waste of time, of Haxon's sarcasms, he asked himself why he hung around as much as he did. At such times he could never find the answer. But in a warm and brilliant restaurant, with good food before him, rag-time around him, and the exuberant personality of Bangs across the table, it came with extraordinary clearness.

"Time's up," he would tell his friend. "Come on. Haxon only gave us an hour."

Usually, to Bangs, the mere reminder was as a dropped bird to a hunting-dog; but occasionally even he showed a disposition to hang back from the chase.

"What's the rush?" he would ask. "They'll go on all right. Wait till I finish my cigar."

But Laurie could not wait. With one hand he would jam Bangs's hat on his head, with the other he would forcibly inject that reluctant youth into his overcoat, and

in five minutes more the pair would be back in the wings, listening to the same thing over and over and over, and finding it the most absorbing interest they knew.

Aside from the slight detail of rewriting the play every few minutes, as Bangs put it, there was little they could do. All suggestions for the company must, of course, be made through Haxon, who passed them on if he approved of them and if he happened to recall them afterward. Occasionally Laurie held the lines of some distraught soul who had done so much careless work in "stock" that literal memorizing had become a lost art to her, and who gaily extemporized from day to day, until Haxon's attention was directed to her versatility.

Always there was present a youth who carried the book of the play and gazed away from it with an unseeing eye. His task, especially toward the end of the rehearsal period, was to sternly call attention to any departure, however slight, from the typewritten text. He was, Haxon often mentioned, to insist on the exactness of "every. if, and, and but." As to do so would mean incessant interruption, the young man cheerily ignored all but the most glaring lapses. Laurie wondered over this, and over the fact that practically every player began almost every line of the play with a casual and extemporaneous "well" or "oh," whose iteration got on his nerves, but left Bangs unmoved.

Indeed, "young Jones" was the only person concerned in the production to whom words and the value of words seemed important. Epstein and Haxon wanted "situations"; the members of the company wanted laughs or thrills or tears. Bangs wanted what he called "crisp dialogue." If the lines were short and expressed what he

meant, any one of half a dozen ways of putting his ideas suited him equally well.

The day before Christmas Laurie tore himself from a rehearsal long enough to race down-town to the post-office and get the note Barbara had promised to have there for him. There was a long line of men and women writhing in the corridor, like a restless serpent, and Laurie added himself to the tail of it with deliberate patience.

In five minutes he did not see the line. In ten he had forgotten where he was. About this time the company had reached a certain scene which, after weeks of rehearsing, had never yet gone perfectly. He saw the tense little group, saw Haxon's cold, tired face, almost heard the cues—

"Name!" The word was hurled at him through the goal he had unconsciously reached—the window labeled "General Delivery."

"Dev—Jones—Lawrence Jones."

"What!"

"Lawrence Jones." This very slowly and distinctly. "Got it?" Laurie grinned. The young man facing him was regarding him with black suspicion.

"We got about a million Joneses here." The clerk attacked a mass of letters heavy enough to support his assertion.

"Keep them," advised Laurie. "All I want is a single letter, postmarked in New York, and addressed with simple beauty to *Lawrence* Jones."

"We got about a dozen L. Joneses," observed the youth, with unlifted gloom. "Any of these yourn?"

Laurie looked them over and found the one addressed in Barbara's handwriting. "This is," he said. "But

I'd like to keep the little blue one, too, and the big one that looks as if it held a check."

"Get out! Next!"

Lawrence Jones departed, sighing. In the subway, into which he descended with the desire to save time, he opened his sister's letter. It was very brief. Barbara explained that she was in a little room on the top floor of an East Side lodging-house, and could not ask him there, but that she would meet him at one o'clock on Christmas day at a good restaurant, whose name and address she gave him. "After lunch we can walk in the Park, if you like," she ended, simply.

He was glad to hear from her, and glad to know that she was all right. He would be glad to see her the next day, and he immediately decided that the lunch should be "on" him, and a good one. But after it he would have to go to the rehearsal called for Christmas day.

It was a time when every minute counted. Almost at once the company was going out of town for a brief try-out. Then the play was to be hurled into New York to get the benefit of the post-Christmas season. For the moment Epstein's supreme grievance was that it could not be thrown on in time for holiday week. But Laurie had no idea of giving Barbara any of these details. When they got to her, he hoped they would come with cumulative effect and a big climax.

That afternoon, while the ingénue was in the wings, recovering from a sharp attack of hysteria, Laurie mentioned to Bangs that he had a luncheon engagement for the next day. He was startled by a temperamental explosion on the part of that overwrought young man.

"Hang it, Jones!" he blurted. "Why the devil don't

you speak to me before you make your engagements?" As Jones stared at him in silence, he went on in a different tone, but still sulkily: "Haxon and Miss Chester and I are going to lunch together to-morrow, and talk over the dark scene. Of course we thought you'd be with us."

"I'm sorry," said Laurie, curtly, "but it's impossible."

He himself was irritated, and showed it. He had not liked Bangs's opening remark, nor what it implied. In that moment he did not like Bangs, who glowered at him with a smoldering light in his brown eyes. Both young men were on the extreme edge of their nerves, but only Bangs realized it. He shook his stocky shoulders, and an outline of his grin appeared.

"Girl, I s'pose," he said.

"I don't know why you should think so." Laurie was still dignified.

The outline grew.

"Because it's the only thing that would keep you away from the play. Don't I know? But, say, Lawrence"—his manner became that of a brother—"follow my lead. Forget 'em till the play's on."

Laurie smiled, then laughed. The menacing thing between them skulked away. "It's not what you think," he said, comfortably.

"Oh, well!" Again Rodney shrugged his shoulders. He had the air of knowing a great deal more than he was being told. But he looked at Laurie with the old grin on his haggard face. "It's all right," he agreed. He plunged into the topic that was never more than half a dozen sentences away from their conversation: "Haxon thinks the dark scene is too long. He doesn't believe we

can keep people quiet unless they can see clearly what's going on."

They forgot about the girl.

Laurie reached the restaurant on Christmas Day ten minutes before the appointed hour. He had no idea of keeping his sister waiting for him. He reserved a table, ordered a very good luncheon, subsidized his waiter, and was near the entrance, looking very handsome and eager, when Barbara appeared.

For a moment they stood holding each other's hands, both experiencing a series of unexpected emotions. They had looked toward a joyous reunion and the warming comfort of it; neither had known that its first moment would be so poignant, and neither had dreamed how much would be read in a single glance at the other.

Subconsciously, Barbara had expected a discouraged, sulky, apologetic boy, who would begin his talk by comprehensively condemning New York and all its works in the blackness of his chagrin. Instead, she found a shining-eyed Apollo, who led her down the great room as if he owned the place, and at whose bidding waiters were scurrying as in former days. It was clear that he was in high spirits, and, therefore, as she knew, his most charming self.

She had seen him thus many times before. But never had she seen the air of self-confidence, of poised assurance, which he wore as if it were a new but perfectly fitting garment acquired in the past three months. He was thinner than he had been. He was even a little pale. But his eyes were like black pools with the sunlight on

them. So far, at least, and quite beyond question, things had gone well with Laurie.

He, on the other hand, found himself looking into the tired face of a sister who seemed to have aged many years in three months. There were dark circles below her eyes, and there was a droop to her lips which he had never before seen there. Quietly but carefully he studied her, and as he did so an emotion new and painful stirred in him. Incredible as it seemed, things had not gone well with Bab! The fact was clear enough, yet he could hardly take it in. A protecting tenderness—the first he had ever felt for her—filled the boy's breast. The exultant spirit in him died. He looked at her, solemn-eyed.

"Has it been—hard?" he asked, as they began the meal he had ordered.

"Yes, rather. But you're all right. I can see that at a glance."

"Well, it's all right so far. I'm doing something I'm awfully interested in."

She looked better already. She was leaning forward, animated and absorbed; but some of the brightness died out of her face at his next words.

"I'd rather not say much about it, yet, if you don't mind. I want to wait till October and give you the complete report. May I?"

"Of course. Tell me as much or as little as you like."

Barbara spoke almost apathetically, but her first resentment was followed by relief. The thing worked both ways. If Laurie made no confidences, she could follow his example.

"We will both wait," she agreed, cheerfully. "And,

darling boy—oh, it's so good to see you again, and looking so triumphant and happy."

"But you! I'm awfully afraid things aren't going right with you."

"I've been depressed by the death of a new friend I had made. It was rather a tragedy. Some time I'll tell you about it. So far as my work is concerned, I've got a job. That's all I will say now. I feel as you do. We will both report in October."

Laurie was reassured. The friend's death accounted for Barbara's expression. He should have known in the beginning, he told himself, that it meant more than depression over living conditions. Bab was not the kind to go under in three months, or, for that matter, to go under at all. His mood changed. He wanted to talk, to tell her all about Bangs and the play, and the incredible interest of the new work he had found. As he could not do that, he exerted himself to entertain her, and succeeded.

The Devons usually enjoyed each other, except when they quarreled; and Laurie had often enjoyed Barbara even under that trying condition. It was difficult now to talk interestingly without saying anything about the absorbing present, without dropping hints and clues to each other. Both rallied to the excitement of this new game. Other patrons of the restaurant, lunching alone or in preoccupied groups, looked at the beautiful young things and wondered what they found to laugh over so light-heartedly.

The luncheon was perfect. Barbara enjoyed it without realizing that it was the first really good meal she had eaten since she left home. Her brother paid the check,

masterfully and with a boyish revelation of a "wad" that made her eyes widen. It was the respectable remnant of the wad Bangs had made of the fifty one-dollar bills, assisted by Laurie's newspaper earnings. But Barbara did not see the denomination of the notes, and the roll impressed her.

Laurie, who saw her eyes fall on it, admired the success with which she controlled an expression of surprise. When he had paid the bill, had generously rewarded the waiter, and put on his overcoat, he drew a package from a pocket and handed it to his sister.

"Merry Christmas!" he said. They had forgotten to exchange the greeting when they met.

Barbara dropped back into her chair with a little cry, and tore the tissue wrapping from the long, flat box. Inside lay an ivory paper-cutter Laurie had found in a Japanese shop. It was not an expensive one, but it was a good thing of its kind. Barbara exclaimed again and lifted swimming eyes. Her brother, who had resumed his seat when she took hers, smiled at her across the table.

"Oh, Laurie, it's lovely!"

"I bought it with the first money I earned," he explained. "It's the first thing I've ever given you that wasn't paid for with money you or some one else gave me. Think of that! Nice condition, wasn't it?" He spoke reflectively, as one who touches on the dead past. "We've changed all that," his manner added. "We've changed all that for good."

Barbara accepted the inference. She had produced a little gift for him—a silver key-ring bearing the name *Lawrence Jones* in small script. Holding it on his palm and looking down upon it, Laurie recalled her gift to

him last year—a superb racing-car. The year before, she had given him the polo ponies on which he had set his heart. He reflected that life was a damned queer thing. None of her gifts had ever moved him as the little ring did. In that instant he realized what his sister was doing for him.

"I shall keep this as long as I live," he promised. Then, as he dropped it into his pocket, his manner changed. "I've got to get back to work, Bab," he said. "I'm on a job that has me going just now, so we can't have our walk. You understand, don't you?"

"Laurie! Must you?"

But Barbara was not really disconsolate. The vision of the Infant Samuel rose before her, Samuel of the blowing hair, who had cuddled into her bed at six o'clock that morning, bringing with him the entire contents of the tiny stockings she had helped to fill, save the trifles he had dropped in the outer hall. Samuel was to have a tree to-night, his first, trimmed by her, with Sonya's help. She had promised to be home early.

Instead of combating Laurie's decision, as he had half feared she would, she merely said, "All wight, Lawie." It was her baby name for him, and the assurance whose sweetness had run through their childish years. For the second time that day Laurie's heart melted within him. They had left the table and were in the entrance hall. He took her hands.

"Bab, look at me."

She looked, tenderly and trustfully.

"Do you give me your word that everything is all right with you—that you're all right, absolutely, in every way?"

"Well, I don't know that I'd go as far as that," she replied, dispassionately. "But I've got a job and a small but regular income, and three meals a day, and a clean room, and two good friends under the same roof with me—an adorable baby and a delightful Russian girl."

"And you're satisfied to go on with the experiment? Because if you're not, you know, we'll call it off—like a shot."

A year later Barbara realized how much it had cost her brother to make that offer. At the moment she had no conception of it. "You are satisfied, aren't you?" she asked, with a straight look at him. He met it with one as straight.

"More so than I have ever been before."

"Then so am I."

Her tone dismissed the subject; but the boy who would have accepted its finality three months ago was not the boy who stood beside her now.

"My point is," he insisted, "that I'm not going to hold you to it if you're not comfortable and happy. I've got nothing to brag of; but I honestly believe that it would be safe for you to go back home now and let me go on alone. I believe I could do it."

Barbara's glance held. "Will you answer one question?" she asked.

"As many as you like."

"Then, haven't there been times, since you came, when the one thing that held you to our bargain was the fact that I was here—in the way I am?"

Laurie's eyes dropped. "Yes," he admitted, humbly.

"Then I'm going to stay. And, Laurie, promise me

not to bring up the question again. I can't imagine anything but death or desperate illness that would make me go home."

He accepted the decision without further comment, and they left the restaurant together.

"You'll let me take you home?"

"No, dear. I know you're crazy to get back to that work, whatever it is." Barbara had decided that it was newspaper-work.

"Aren't we to give each other our addresses?"

"I think not."

"When is our next meeting to be?"

She hesitated and shot a side-glance at him. "At home," she suggested, "the first of October. Will that do?"

Laurie shook his head. "I don't think so," he said. "I'd worry about you. Besides, I may be needing to brag, most awfully, before October." He nodded, as if in response to a mental jog. "Suppose we split the difference and say the first of June?" he added.

"Very well." This docile Barbara was as new to him as he seemed to her. "I will call at the post-office the last day of May," she agreed. "Have a letter there for me."

"All right." He wrung her hands. "Bless you, Bab!"

"And bless you, Lawie. Good-by. The happiest kind of a New-Year!"

"The same to you, dear girl!"

They had parted, and this time neither looked behind. Laurie glanced at his watch, and with a spectacular start flew toward the subway. Barbara, with a picture of

Samuel in her mind, stopped to buy a mechanical toy from a depressed street vender whose Christmas stock had been too large. Fifteen minutes later the welcoming shriek of the Infant Samuel was in her ears.

"Yes, we're going to play every single minute from now to bedtime," she was assuring him.

At precisely the same moment Mr. Rodney Bangs, his pompadour quivering with excitement, was shouting to Laurie across the dim stage.

"Say, Jones," he yelped, exultantly, "we open in Atlantic City next Thursday night, and come into New York the Monday after. What d'ye know about that? Quick work, eh? Some hustle!"

To the music of this cry Laurie thrilled as he had rarely thrilled before. He crossed the stage in three bounds. In a corner Bangs, Epstein, and Haxon formed a close circle that readily opened to take him in.

"Good work!" he cried. "And say, Bangs, I've got an idea about that dark scene—"

"Get the girl off your hands?" inquired Bangs.

Epstein and Haxon, to whom Bangs had conveyed the idea that Laurie was off philandering, grinned in sympathy. They were in a royal humor. Several associates of Epstein had seen the rehearsal and pronounced the play a knock-out. "They'll eat it," one authority added, solemnly. Now, under the bantering of a relieved author, producer, and director, Laurie stared unintelligently.

"Girl?" he muttered. He had forgotten that there was a girl on earth.

The "try-out" in Atlantic City was a depressing affair. The actual first production had occurred in a

small New Jersey town, with most of the "props" missing and a powerful local attraction so rivaling Bangs's play in interest that half the seats in the theater were empty on the fateful night. In Atlantic City a critical gathering, made up of local manager and his friends, watched the late afternoon rehearsal that preceded the formal opening, and shook skeptical heads. The local manager, indeed, was heard to confide to a friend that he had put more plays in the storehouse than them New York guys had ever seen.

Epstein looked as if he had lost his last dollar. Bangs and the leading lady had their first argument, over the position of a piece of furniture in a short scene in the second act. Both lost their tempers and the leading lady ascended to a peak of isolation from which her lines came down to them like drifting snowflakes. Haxon's tongue was a rapier cutting in every direction. Even Laurie, an acknowledged favorite of his, felt the point of it and retired huffily to a distant seat in the auditorium.

Laurie was now convinced that the play would fail simply because this bunch was going to let it fail. He was full of an abysmal sympathy for Bangs and for himself. Incidentally and absently he wiped away the tears of the ingénue, who was Haxon's latest victim and had fled to young Jones for comfort.

When the curtain went up for the first official performance the theater was not more than two-thirds full, and for this Bangs, high in the gallery with Laurie, severely blamed Epstein.

"That big boob hasn't even sense enough to paper the house," he muttered.

After the first act, meeting Epstein in the lobby, he

made the same criticism in gentler words, and got a recoil from that big gun that almost knocked him over.

"What did you want me to do?" yelped the embittered producer. "I offered 'em free seats. Should I *pay* 'em two dollars to come in and laugh at us?"

Bangs wandered back into the gallery. He was very unhappy. The first act had not gone well.

The second act went better. In response to the impassioned appeals of Haxon, the company bucked up. The audience began to get the spirit of the entertainment. Chairs cautious souls had left vacant during the first act now were occupied. Word had gone up and down the Boardwalk that the new play had something in it. The third act went quite well. The big scene got over; so did some of the other scenes. At the end of the last act groups of good-natured and fairly satisfied men paused in the lobby to exchange views, to argue, most of all to suggest changes.

"It's got to have changes," Laurie heard on all sides.

Bangs was exuberant. "We've got 'em going," he said. "They ate it."

Epstein, now warming them with his presence, raised his eyebrows. "If they ate it, they ate like a dyspeptic man eats something he ain't sure agrees with him," he commented, grimly. Then he grew paternal. "Mebbe we got something," he admitted. "I don't know yet. But, young man, I tell you what; you got to make a lot of changes!"

Bangs rewrote half a dozen scenes in his play during the next three days; and the company, memorizing the new lines and getting them mixed with the old ones,

conveyed to him a conviction that this was more than players should be asked to bear.

On the opening night in New York, an ordeal compared to which the previous experiences were occasions of silent rapture, the play, in Laurie's opinion, was a hopeless hotch-potch. As Bangs had predicted, he was tired of every line in it; he had lost all sense of values; yet not for the wealth of the world would he have missed one single speech, one shortest scene.

Again, as in Atlantic City, he and Bangs sat in the balcony. In New York, however, they looked down on a crowded and brilliant house, and during the first minutes of the first act two things were clear—the company was giving out the best that was in it, and the audience was interested and friendly.

Several unfortunate incidents occurred. The quick curtain called for at the end of the second act moved with the deliberation of a young thing whose life is all before it; the lights flashed on for an inopportune second in the dark scene; and the saddest sight of the evening was Rodney Bangs, alone on the stage, trying to make a speech with a tongue that was stiff with fright. But the audience applauded with kindly sympathy, and Epstein, waiting in the wings, nodded to the pallid youth.

"I guess we got 'em," he commented, briefly.

Bangs clutched his arm. "Tell 'em so," he begged. "Mebbe they don't know it."

Epstein shook a pitying head. "You go home," he said, indulgently. "You're all in."

Bangs thought he was. Before the final curtain Laurie hurried to the lobby to listen to the comments of the audience as it left the theater. He was conscious of a

growing exhilaration. Slowly but surely the truth burst upon him. Those folks liked the play! They really liked it. He turned to rush back to Bangs with the great news, and bumped violently into a gentleman in evening clothes.

"Pardon me," jerked Laurie. "Awfully sorry."

He was hurrying on, but the other stopped him with a touch on his arm.

"Hello!" he said, good-humoredly. And then, with a smile, "You found a job, didn't you?"

Laurie stared at him for a second, then returned the smile. He recognized the nice chap he had met in a restaurant during his first month in New York. Their hands met in a friendly grip.

"What makes you think I've got a job?" he asked.

The other's eyebrows went up. "Why, man, you have the air of owning the place! There's an atmosphere of importance, anxiety, and triumph around you that hangs over no one but playwrights, critics, stars, and managers. What are you doing with it, if you're not one or all of them?"

"I'm being a friend and brother to the playwright. Come behind. I'd like to have you meet him."

They found Bangs in the wings, basking in the adulation of the company. The leading lady had kissed him. Epstein had given him a blow on the back that almost dislodged his studs from their setting. Even the call-boy approached respectfully, as to a shrine.

Bangs was white with excitement, and his burnished pompadour gleamed in the bright lights. When Laurie came up he threw an arm across his friend's shoulder and gave him a boyish hug.

"But we mustn't be too sure!" he said, cautiously. "The critics may roast us in the morning!"

"Roast nothin'," said Epstein. "They can't kill this here play. We got 'em goin'."

Bangs received Warren with a warm hand-clasp, but Laurie doubted if he even heard the introduction. However, Warren was not a man to be overlooked, and he was speaking now with an ingratiating flash of his irregular white teeth.

"It's a ripping play," he said, cordially. "I don't know when I've enjoyed anything more."

He turned to Laurie, who, though as triumphant as Bangs, wore his delight more coolly. It showed in his eyes, in his brilliant face, in the smile so like that other smile. . . . Warren warmed to him. He did not intend to lose sight of this youth again.

"Can't we have a little celebration?" he suggested. "Won't you and Mr. Bangs come to supper with me—?"

He checked himself. Probably these youngsters had made their own plans. But no, Bangs was accepting.

"Sure thing," said the playwright, heartily. "But it may be late. Perhaps Epstein will want us to rewrite the play, and that will hold us a few minutes."

He nodded to Warren. A stunning-looking chap, he thought him, and plainly in Jones's class. It was an item in the long list of his triumphs that he could flash two such pals as this before Epstein and the rest of the bunch.

"That's capital," said Warren. His quiet ease was a strong contrast to the heady excitement of those around him.

It was after midnight before the three sat down at a table in the Ritz. In the interval Warren had learned

something of Jones's standing with the company. They all liked him, and deferred to him surprisingly. It was clear that he had been working hard.

When the champagne came Laurie hesitated, then shook his head with longing eyes. He wanted that champagne; he wanted it most awfully. He felt that he had never wanted anything quite so much; and he thought of a dozen reasons why, on this special occasion, his promise to Barbara need not hold. Then he remembered his sister's tired face, and the line of his young jaw stiffened.

"Wagon," he explained, briefly, as he reversed his glass.

Warren nodded. He drank very little. Bangs rather let himself go. In his opinion, the time had come to celebrate. For the first time he showed a disposition to insist that Laurie should drink with him, but even while he was speaking he met Warren's steady eyes and buried his words in his glass. He was not yet intoxicated, but he was intensely excited and he talked more than usual. He talked of the play, of former plays, of rehearsals, of Epstein, of Laurie—most of all of Laurie.

"He's going to write the next play," he told Warren, indicating Laurie. "And I'm going to collaborate, if he'll let me."

Laurie leaned toward him. "Does that go?" he asked, breathlessly.

"S-surest thing you know," declared Bangs, emptying the glass the waiter had just refilled. "And if this play g-gets over the way it seems to be g-going," he added, "Epstein will put on our new play like a s-shot. Did you hear him ask me if I had anything else s-started? When

did he think I could start it, do you s-suppose? But he'll get it, all r-right," he added, again turning to Warren. "Jones's got it up his s-sleeve."

Laurie nodded. "We'll talk about it to-morrow," he said.

"To-morrow n-nothing. We'll—we'll—s-start—start it to-night," declared Bangs.

He rose, not as steadily as usual, and took Warren's hand in his powerful grip, grinning his widest grin.

"Good night, Mr. Warren. G-glad to know you. Hope we'll s-see more of each other. Any time you want a b-box—"

"I'll put him to bed," laughed Laurie, rising also.

Bangs blinked. "I *am* s-sleepy," he admitted. "Got to be up with the b-birds, too, to get all the n-newspapers. Well, so—long."

Warren left with them and called a taxicab. "I'll drop you at your door," he said.

He had not liked that longing look in the boy's eyes when he refused the champagne. He did not intend to run the risk of letting the two youngsters, in their high-strung mood, drop into other places on their way home. He left them at their door, made a mental note of the street and number, and rode away feeling rather like a good Samaritan.

XIV

BARBARA CHANGES HER OCCUPATION

IT was the end of March, and half of Barbara's year of experiment was gone. As dispassionately as if she were considering the record of some one else she reviewed her efforts, her achievements, and her failures.

For six months she had addressed envelopes for the unappreciative firm of Wade & Manning. Counting six working-days to the week, and subtracting holidays and the off hours of Saturday afternoons, she loosely estimated that she had addressed more than one hundred and eighty-two thousand envelopes, ninety per cent. of which, she knew, had been lightly dropped into the nearest waste-paper baskets by their resentful recipients.

She had earned about two hundred dollars, and she had spent more than two hundred and seventy dollars. To the note she had given Warren in payment of the expenses of Marini's illness and funeral she gave little thought. She had tossed that over the high wall that shut her in, and it lay in the sunshine of the other side on the untrodden plain of the coming year. But the deficit of seventy dollars sorely pricked her pride. To the amount of seventy dollars she had failed to meet her obligations to herself.

To the world she had handed its due. She had pawned

certain possessions to pay for the indulgences those seventy dollars represented—indulgences such as cheap toys for the Infant Samuel, and small donations to the poor. The necessary smallness of these donations was one of the conditions hardest to bear.

She had always given freely and had loved to give. Now the joy of giving was almost denied her. Once, as she was hurrying home on Saturday night, an Italian woman staggered toward her, carrying a baby and leading a second infant by the hand. It was so young an infant that its tiny legs buckled under it as it walked. Before Barbara the woman stopped, and, releasing the hand of the baby by her side, pointed with a gesture of indescribable pathos, first to the mouths of the children, then to her own mouth.

Barbara looked at each member of the little group. It was plain that all three were starving. She opened her purse and emptied its contents into the Italian's hand. She had been paid that day; the proceeds of her week's work lay on the bony palm. The woman stared at it, her eyes slowly widening; then, still without a word, she fell at the girl's feet, and, grasping a fold of Barbara's skirt, raised it to her lips.

Barbara wrote out for her the address of the Associated Charities, but she knew the woman would not go there. She would crawl back with her children to the wretched room that meant home, and there, until the money was gone, they would have food and shelter. After that—what?

The ache of her heart as she left them was almost unendurable; surely a world in which women and children starved every day, on every side of one, was too horrible a place to live in. Her soul was tortured by the constant

spectacle of tragedies of which she had always read, which by generous giving she had tried to relieve, and yet of which, until now, she had failed to realize the actual existence.

After leaving the Italian she pawned the only ring she wore—a ring Laurie had given her when he and she were small. It did not bring much, but she paid her room rent and lived on short rations the following week. The instance was one of a dozen, when, meeting some one ill, helpless or homeless, she gave all she had, and for weeks afterward was haunted by the knowledge of the desolation and despair of individual fellow-beings. She never mentioned these episodes to Sonya. She knew that Sonya had many pensioners, largely among the little children of her own people. But the two girls talked for hours of sociological problems, and, like others wiser than themselves, found no answer to the great city's saddest question.

Barbara found almost her sole relaxation in the society of Sonya and Samuel. At rare intervals she and the Russian girl went to a moving-picture play; but they had to choose the ten-cent houses, and neither approved of the lack of ventilation in those palaces of pleasure.

Twice Barbara let Warren take her to tea, on New-Year's Day at the Ritz, and in February at the Plaza. She refused to dine or to go to the theater, and after the second tea she abruptly declined to see him again. When he demanded the reason she could not give it. She could not tell him the truth. She was not willing to feel that even unconsciously she was depending on him in her new world. She promised to see him in October, and with this he had to be content.

She made no new friends; she saw nothing more of Loomis or his wife. She could not dine with Sonya, whose expensive tastes soared to a fifty-cent *table d'hôte* meal every night. On her way up-town Barbara dropped into one of the numerous places where for twenty cents she could get a bowl of soup, bread and butter, and a baked apple. This was her usual bill of fare, occasionally varied by rice pudding or by bread and milk. For breakfast she had coffee and a roll; for lunch a glass of milk. The beautiful Miss Devon was actually underfed, but she rarely saw her hollowing cheeks and fading color, owing to the presence of home-laundered handkerchiefs drying on her one mirror. She loathed seeing them there, but she loathed still more having them blur the prospect that lay beyond her window.

Sometimes, sitting alone in her little room, she would stare at the floor in a black abstraction from which only the entrance of Samuel or Sonya could arouse her. She was making the fight of her life, and the thing she was fighting for was merely the strength to endure existence until the first of October. Her starving nerves were taking their revenge, and the form they chose was an exaggerated distaste for the sordidness of her environment. Fastidious to the core, accustomed from her cradle to perfect comfort and beauty in her surroundings, almost every condition of the present set her teeth on edge.

The lodging-house had two bathrooms, and Barbara, Sonya, Samuel and his mother, and three young men used the one on the third floor. The only thing that could be worse than using it, she somberly confided to Sonya, would be not to use it. Each morning she scrubbed

it out with antiseptic soap, and then entered it with every instinct protesting against the act.

The Infant Samuel sometimes assisted at this distressing function, bringing with him the celluloid duck, which, by floating lightly on the water, diverted his mind from the too energetic scrubbings his mother gave him. He passed on this solace to his friend; and with the duck in the water, and Samuel close by on the floor, Barbara could sometimes forget the tub. But neither Samuel nor the duck could always be with her.

There were smells to endure, even in that reasonably clean house. Why something should always be cooking and its odor permeating the halls she could not understand. Why Mrs. Blake apparently lived exclusively on turnips and cabbage she did not know, either, until she learned that her landlady was a vegetarian and that in winter the price of fresh vegetables was "something fierce." Barbara's one towel a day looked a sad affair by night, especially after Samuel's hands and features had been polished off a few times; and the dusty carpets in bedrooms and halls had never known a vacuum cleaner.

In the big room down-town conditions were even worse. At home her one towel was at least her own and Samuel's; at the office two roller-towels did daily duty for a regiment of girls. She discovered that Kate Martin brought paper towels and kept a supply for personal use; she followed Miss Martin's example in this and was happier, but still on the wrong side of content. Life was so messy when one was frightfully poor! But possibly she could stand it. She had endured the past six months. Could she endure six more?

Her distaste for the conditions around her was evidently

based on the state of her nerves; they had not seemed so bad at first, and even now they were not too bad in the freshness of the morning hours. She viewed them then with a broad tolerance. By noon the gum-chewing, handkerchief-using, coughing, and nail-cleaning around her were annoying her; by three o'clock they were on her nerves; by half after five she usually felt that she could not have endured them five minutes longer.

During her noon hour she learned to know lower New York. Her luncheon was an affair of ten minutes. After it she often walked down to the Battery and let its bracing winds sweep over her; then, looking at the signs of the various steamship companies, she wished with all her heart that she could walk into one of those offices, as she had so often done in the past, and buy a ticket to some place on the other side of the world.

The atmosphere of old Trinity usually brought a certain peace. She loved, also, to stroll through City Hall Park and along Newspaper Row, or up the Bowery, and even, at times, through the sinister labyrinth of Chinatown. Occasionally she walked to the river and watched the ferry-boats weave back and forth. On Sundays, with Samuel lurching between them, she and Sonya visited Riverside Drive or the parks.

All the time, combined with her nervous depression, was the knowledge that in each day that passed she was losing an opportunity. Somewhere, in the same city, Laurie was making good. Why was she not making good? What was the matter with her? She was an excellent musician; she spoke three languages; she drove horses and automobiles with equal skill. But in the world of workers she stood on a level with Mamie Leigh.

On the afternoon of the last day of March Miss Martin curtly asked her to remain after the others had gone. She obeyed with an unfamiliar throb of hope. Could it be that, after all the seeming indifference of Bates, the firm meant to give her something better?

But the face of Kate Martin, when she looked at it, was not the face of one who comes bearing gifts. For the first time in Barbara's experience with her, Miss Martin was ill at ease. She was almost fussily replacing the old blotter on her desk with a fresh one, and when she spoke she kept her eyes on this work.

"I'm sorry, Miss Smith," she said, abruptly, "but we've got to let a lot of our girls go. I'm telling you a week ahead, so you can look around a little."

Barbara's heart stopped beating, then leaped toward her throat.

"You mean that I—" She could not go on.

Miss Martin nodded. Her eyes were on the new blotter and she was carefully pressing thumb-tacks into its four corners.

"But I thought—I was sure I was doing the work—" faltered Barbara.

Kate Martin looked up. "Of course you were," she said, heartily. "You've done fine. But, you see, the season's over. We're only keeping a few of our regular girls. It's always that way."

"Oh! I see. Thank you."

With something of the stiff jerkiness of a mechanical toy Barbara moved away. With the same stiffness she put on her hat and coat. She was not conscious of clear thought until she found herself in the street, walking toward lower Broadway. Then she realized that the

doom the girls discussed so much, and usually in whispers, had overtaken her. She had been "fired"!

The surprise and the shock of the experience were so overwhelming that at first she did not feel the humiliation. That was to come later. The thing to think of now was another job. Kate Martin had advised her to "look around." "But"—Barbara's brain was beginning to work, and with an alarming alertness—"what was the use of 'looking around' if the 'season was over'? Wasn't it over everywhere, or was it? She did not know. Sonya would know, of course. She would ask Sonya.

The thought of Sonya brought a slight lessening of the nervous tension. Surely Sonya would know of something. Afterward it was interesting for Barbara to recall that not for one second had she considered the possibility of giving up and going home. She had not even remembered that she had a home. She had got the full force of her dismissal as strongly as any Barbara Smith could have got it. In that half-hour she had stood absolutely alone.

She and Sonya rarely came up-town together. Sonya usually worked at least half an hour overtime. The efficiency of Mr. Bates allowed no opportunity for such elasticity of effort among the members of his staff. The bell rang; the doors opened, then closed. Before they closed the staff was on the outside of them. Otherwise, it was believed, the staff would remain till morning. No one had ever verified this theory by experiment. When Barbara reached home Sonya was not yet there, nor was the voice of Samuel heard in the halls.

She climbed the stairs with the step of an old woman, and as she entered her room and looked dully around she learned another primer lesson—this time on relative values.

Only yesterday she had dwelt here protestingly; only this morning she had wondered if she could endure the place six months more. Now it seemed a haven, the only haven she knew; and it was to be taken from her. In that moment she felt that it would be pure happiness to wake from this nightmare and know that her job was going on.

When Sonya rapped she did not hear her, and the caller, opening the door, found her seated staring at the floor, as she had often done before, but, yes, with a difference.

"What has happened?" asked Sonya, quickly.

"I've lost my job."

Barbara's voice, usually a thing of wonderful modulations, uttered the four words on two flat notes. The other girl slowly seated herself on the bed. Her face had flushed with anger.

"That Bates!" she muttered. "He promised me he'd not only keep you, but that he would give you something better this spring. He has forgotten all about it," she added, acidly. "I will remind him in the morning; and if he doesn't make good I will go to Mr. Wade and have you put back over Bates's head. I believe I could do it."

Something in Barbara flickered up, burning at first feebly, then strongly, as if a match had been touched to slightly dampened fuel. "No, you must not," she said. She straightened in her chair and looked at her friend. "I'll never forgive you if you try it," she added, firmly. "If I can't earn eight dollars, I won't take it as charity, or as a matter of friendship. But, Sonya," the blaze died down, "is there anything, anywhere, that I could do, do you think?" she added, despondently.

"Of course!" The answer held robust assurance.

"What?"

For a moment Sonya did not answer. "Do you remember Hempel?" she asked at last.

"The little fat violinist we met at Mrs. Loomis's? Yes. He looks like a seal."

"He acts like one, too," commented Sonya, bitterly. "He promised to get you some accompanying to do. Don't you remember? And he hasn't done a thing! But I know where he lives. I'll write him to-night."

Her face had brightened. Her voice took on color. "You see, there's a lot of music during Lent. People too pious to do anything else go to concerts, and the sinful ones go, too. There ought to be work." She nodded with finality. "I will write to Hempel," she repeated, and forthwith departed to do so.

That night she took Barbara to an up-town moving-picture theater, to divert her mind; but the friendly effort failed, for the film set forth, in great detail, the privations of a fair young thing out of work in a great city. It brought out a flash of Barbara's old spirit. She nudged Sonya.

"Hadn't we better leave?" she whispered. "I'll be taking off my shoes in five minutes more, and eating the tops!"

Hempel replied to Sonya's note with gratifying promptness. His letter was brought up to Barbara the next evening by the Infant Samuel, to whom stair-climbing now seemed life's greatest joy.

Hempel remembered perfectly the charming Miss Smith. He had mentioned her to several of his musical friends. Twice he had been on the point of writing to her, but the seeming opportunity for work had not de-

veloped. Now he had telephoned to Miss Florence Bradley, an amateur who, he had heard, was looking for an accompanist for morning practice. She needed one two hours every day, except Sunday, and she would pay fifty cents an hour. It was very little, but what would you? And later, no doubt, there would be others. Would Miss Smith also telephone Miss Bradley, making an appointment?

Barbara threw the letter on the bed and, seizing the Infant Samuel, kissed him till his fat cheeks glowed. The Infant Samuel absently patted her back. His mind was on other things.

"Tat-wat?" he suggested.

"We're going to take a walk down-stairs this minute," his hostess mentioned, lightly. "I've got to telephone."

Miss Bradley, it appeared, was dressing for dinner, but Barbara ruthlessly interrupted the function. Mr. Hempel's information was confirmed.

"Of course it's a question of trying you out," said Miss Bradley, whose speaking voice was agreeable.

"Of course. May I come this evening?"

"Heavens! You take my breath away!" The agreeable voice held a suggestion of a laugh. "Why, yes, I think so. I am going out at nine. Come at half past eight, and we will run over a few things."

Barbara hung up the receiver with fingers that trembled. Six dollars a week, for only twelve hours of work! How long would it have taken her to reach such a schedule under the unobservant Bates? She smiled down into the trustful eyes of the Infant Samuel, who was standing beside her, clasping one of her legs with both arms. Unless he took that precaution, he had discovered,

grown-ups, by reason of a superior swiftness of movement, occasionally got away from him. At present, if Miss Smith moved, Samuel would certainly move with her.

At exactly half past eight Barbara rang the electric bell of an imposing house on a street in the East Sixties. A Japanese butler opened the door and ushered her into an empty music-room at the end of a long hall. Here she waited twenty minutes. Her optimism did not; it ebbed in ten. Miss Bradley, whoever she was, was probably a temperamental, irresponsible sort of person, who had already forgotten the appointment, or who, if she remembered it, attached no importance to a detail so trivial as the enforced lingering of a young person in her music-room.

The room itself Barbara had taken in with one comprehensive glance. It was like hundreds of rooms she had seen, expensive, luxurious, and wholly without character. It and the wonderful music-room in Devon House were as unlike as any two rooms could be. As always when she was not interested in her surroundings, Barbara turned her glance inward.

"Miss Smith?"

She came back to the present. Miss Bradley was entering the room. She was a large blonde, with a round face that shone like a rising moon. She was good-humored, over-dressed, over-weight. Weighing fifty pounds less, she would have been rather superb. She wore huge round glasses with tortoise-shell rims. Behind them, her blue-gray eyes held the unshadowed clearness of a child's. Miss Bradley never burdened her mind with the taxing demands of serious thought.

As Barbara rose to greet her the blue-gray eyes took on

the suddenly arrested look which was the world's tribute to Miss Devon's beauty. Their owner's manner changed to that of one addressing a member of her own class.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," she said. "But two friends have just called. You don't mind if they come in, do you?"

The two friends were already entering, in the footsteps of their hostess. The slender, tall woman in black who languidly trailed in first, wearing a wonderful Russian wrap over one shoulder and letting the rest of it add luster to the polished floor, was a stranger. Her companion was Warren, whose blond head rose with a jerk as his eyes met Barbara's. He went to her at once.

"Miss Smith!" he cried. "This *is* luck! I didn't know—"

Barbara hastened to give him the social cue. "I am here to play Miss Bradley's accompaniments," she said, sedately, but her eyes shone.

Miss Bradley, already at the piano, faced about. "Do you two know each other?" she asked.

Warren answered before Barbara could do so. "Miss Smith and I had a common friend," he explained—"the great Marini."

Florence Bradley's round eyes grew rounder. "Marini? You knew Marini?" She was plainly impressed.

"I played some of her accompaniments."

Warren capped the little structure rising so solidly before their hostess. "Miss Smith played for Marini the last time she sang in public," he added.

"Oh, well—then that's all right."

What was all right Miss Bradley did not say, but Barbara knew. Here most certainly she would have been

asked for references; and here, at the crisis, they were, signed by a living hand with the magic name of the dead singer.

The languid woman had thrown off her wrap and dropped on a big davenport before the open fire. She had the air of not having observed the stranger. Her face had a cold, insolent beauty.

"I'm sure I don't know why you insist on singing, Flossie," she murmured, discontentedly. "Nobody ever wants you to."

Miss Bradley, now looking over a disorderly mass of sheet music, uttered a low hoot.

"I want me to," she said. "And Miss Smith wants me to. I'm almost sure that Bob Warren wants me to. So be still, Louise, and let us soothe your savage breast." She turned to Barbara. "She hates my singing," she added. "You've also met, Miss Smith—you and Mrs. Ordway?"

The languid woman smiled up at Barbara without altering her relaxed pose.

"We have now. I shall like *your* music," she added.

Barbara returned the smile. "How do you know you will?"

"I feel it." The languid woman suppressed a yawn. "After Florence has shattered the peaceful atmosphere awhile, we'll have you play to us. Then perhaps I can drop off."

Barbara decided she did not like the languid woman.

"Mrs. Ordway doesn't sleep well," the hostess explained. "The only time she can sleep is when she's interested or there's a racket going on. There's usually something doing where I am, so she follows me about like a puppy, and takes naps on my rugs and divans."

"It's nothing to laugh at," muttered the languid woman.

Barbara, looking past her at Warren, who was assisting his hostess to encumber the music-rack, was startled by the look he cast at Mrs. Ordway. It was a very tender look, and beautiful in its understanding sympathy.

"We will sing this first," Miss Bradley was saying.

Barbara began the prelude. Warren, still beside the piano, rested his elbows on the case and fixed his eyes on her face. Miss Bradley sang, and, in doing so, thwarted the plans of her Creator, who had made her for no such purpose. She had spent a fortune in lessons, but there was not one really good note in her manufactured voice. Listening to her, Barbara felt a poignant sympathy for Mrs. Ordway, who lay on the davenport, staring at the ceiling with wide, hot eyes.

"The thing I most dislike about your singing, Flossie," she drawled at the first pause, "is that it's so abominably off the key. Don't you supply ear-muffs with that song? You really ought to!"

Miss Bradley hooted again. "Let's give her a lullaby," she suggested, forgivingly. "Here's a nice Irish one."

But "Husheen" sent Mrs. Ordway out of the room and into some remote fastness of the house, from which she did not soon reappear. Her hostess looked disapprovingly at the empty davenport.

"I don't see why she doesn't like my singing," she said. "Others do. Hempel said only last night: 'Miss Bradley, I simply can't tell you what I think of your voice!' "

It was to Barbara the first revelation of her new em-

ployer's strongest weakness—a colossal vanity, so child-like, so unquestioning, that it fed on any food. In the months to come she was constantly to quote similar encomiums.

"When Weinigen heard me sing," Flossie once told Barbara, "he was quiet a long time. I could see that he was moved. Then he said, very simply, 'Miss Bradley, I've never heard anything quite like it.' Wasn't that wonderful—and from Weinigen!"

Where, Barbara wondered at such times, was Florence Bradley's sense of humor? She had one, and combined with it a nice appreciation of the humor of others. But when she discussed her Art, as Warren subsequently expressed it, her sense of humor gave her a reproachful look and slunk away with its tail between its legs.

To-night, when she had sung half a dozen songs, she abruptly asked Barbara to play, and while the girl was responding she disappeared, obviously in search of her friend. Warren moved closer—so close that, still leaning on the piano, he could look down into the player's face. She played on, and he listened in silence.

"I love your playing," he said at last.

"Do you? I'm glad."

"You play as if you had a heart and soul," he went on, slowly—"a heart and soul full of music and passion. And yet—"

"You think I haven't?"

"I don't let myself think anything. I only know that you have treated me with abominable cruelty."

Her music stopped. She cried out. "How *can* you say that?"

"Because it's true."

"It is not true." Barbara resumed her music.

"Oh yes, it is, and you know it. Why haven't you let me see you?"

"Because—because—"

Mrs. Ordway sauntered in from the hall, her face a discontented white oval in the room's dim light. She resumed her place on the davenport. "Play the *Pathetique,*" she ordered.

"Which one?"

"Beethoven's, of course."

The tone was that of an irritable superior. Barbara flushed, then obeyed it. The music filled the room and flowed through the corridors of the big house. Miss Bradley, for the moment subdued, brooded in a chair before the fire. Warren, a motionless silhouette, kept his eyes on the musician's face.

"Good," said Mrs. Ordway, drowsily. "Now something of Richard Strauss—something from 'Death and Transfiguration,' if you know the piano score."

Barbara knew it and loved it. She knew the *Heldenleben,* too, and played it. "Though it is a crime," she admitted, "to attempt these things on the piano, when even the Boston Symphony Orchestra can't do them justice! I have never heard but one orchestra that could. That was in Vienna."

"Play them all again," commanded Mrs. Ordway, drowsily, and Barbara obeyed.

A little later Warren smiled at her. "She is asleep," he said. There was a quiet triumph in his eyes, and the same look of understanding tenderness they had worn before.

"What is she to you?"

The question was so pervasively in Barbara's mind that she almost believed she had asked it aloud.

"She is making a stiff fight," he went on, still looking at the sleeping figure on the davenport. "But I am urging her to go to a sanitarium to get the help she really needs."

He was urging her! Why was he urging her?

"What is it? Nerves?"

"Yes. Insomnia, head noises, all the rest of the abominable tribe. Her husband was killed in France last autumn, serving with the American Aviation Corps. They had been married only five years."

Barbara rose. She had remembered that this was not a social evening. Miss Bradley let her depart, after she had recovered from the first shock of discovering that Miss Smith desired to do so.

"It's all settled, then," she added, lightly. "Can you begin to-morrow? Why not? Oh, that's too bad! Well, then, Monday at eleven."

Warren accompanied Barbara to the hall and sent the butler out into the world for a taxicab. When it had come and she was inside, he gave the chauffeur the address and a bank-note, and blocked further progress by standing with firm elbows on the open window frame. In the darkness of the street his handsome face smiled in at her with unconscious wistfulness.

"Won't you let me take you home?" he begged.

"Of course not."

"Won't you let me come and see you?"

"Not yet."

He moved back without another word. Something in his look made her think of Samuel.

"Good night."

"Good night."

He stood looking after her, bareheaded, his hair ruffled by the night wind. Watching him, she saw that he did not move until the cab had turned a corner.

Barbara parted without a pang from her associates at Wade & Manning's. Pangs, indeed, seemed in almost every case to be purely commercial ones. Most of the girls were also departing. Mamie Leigh was to be "married" without loss of time. She had a dark fear that her gentleman friend was putting into the bank money which he might better be spending on her. Miss Martin gave Barbara a firm, cool hand. The faithless Bates she did not see at all.

After the practice period of the following Monday, which was a rather painful ordeal, Miss Bradley remembered to give her accompanist a message.

"Louise Ordway wants to engage you," she said, abruptly. "She has an idea that you could play her to sleep. She intends to have a piano moved into her bedroom. It will mean night work. She will want you to play at eleven or twelve every night, for an hour or two, perhaps longer. So she thinks you had better live in her house."

"Oh, I don't think I could do that!"

Barbara thought of the Infant Samuel and of Sonya. Subsequently she thought of clean towels and a possible bathroom of her own. Also she thought of the look in Warren's eyes when they rested on Mrs. Ordway. She thought of many things.

"I am not sure I could," she added, slowly.

"Well, talk it over with her. And make her pay well,"

suggested Miss Bradley, in airy disregard of the fact that she herself was paying the lowest market rate. "Louise Ordway's got oodles of money. Her husband left her a million. She ought to give you twenty-five dollars a week, at least. She would have to give that to a nurse."

She kept Barbara to lunch. It was a good lunch. Things were looking up with Barbara.

"Go and see Louise this afternoon," was Miss Bradley's parting advice. "She will forget the whole thing if you don't strike while she's hot. She lives on upper Fifth Avenue. Here is her number."

Barbara struck on the hour. She found Mrs. Ordway in a charming room of a beautiful house facing Central Park, giving languid orders to a tired-looking French maid. Her insolent face brightened as the visitor was announced.

"Can you do it?" she asked, without preliminaries.

"I think so."

"It is only an experiment, but I think it will work. You sent me off for three hours at Flossie's the other night, and poor Bob had to wait and flirt with Flossie the whole time. It was frightfully sad, for she bores him to death. About terms." Mrs. Ordway looked almost self-conscious. "Flossie suggested twenty-five dollars a week. Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite."

Barbara mentally added her new income. Twenty-five dollars a week, added to the six dollars from Miss Bradley, meant that she could live in affluence! And what a leap from eight—and Mr. Bates!

A momentary impulse to give up Miss Bradley's six

dollars, and the daily torture of listening to her, was still-born. A man would do that, Barbara was sure. But a woman, some women, *most* women, would feel bound by ties of gratitude. Indirectly, but unmistakably, Miss Bradley had secured for her this new opportunity. Therein lay another difference between men and women in the world of labor. Women could never take a coldly unsentimental attitude toward their relations with others. Or could they? She thought of Miss Martin. Yes, some of them could.

"Then that's settled. Now I will show you your room."

"I don't know that—"

Barbara's words died. She was following Mrs. Ordway through her beautiful house, and every instinct in her clamored joyous appreciation. Oh, to be in this atmosphere again! Not to smell cabbage and musty carpets and kerosene-oil!

"Of course if you're going to play to me half the night, and you'll have to very often, you can't go rambling home at two in the morning. Besides"—Mrs. Ordway hesitated—"can you read aloud?" she said at last.

"Yes."

"Well, it has occurred to me that you might be more than an insomnia cure. You might be a companion. I have never had one. I've hated even the idea. But it might work, with you; I don't know. Sometimes I shall want to be read to; sometimes talked to; sometimes played to. Sometimes I shall want all three. Or I might get sick of them all, and of you, and you might hate me. I have a beastly temper, especially when I don't get any sleep for a few days. It is all an experiment. But we

will try it for a few weeks if you like; and in the mean time these will be your quarters." She threw open a door. "It's a small room, but a pleasant one. And mine is just across this hall."

The room was quite perfect; all chintz and wicker and exquisite tones. Barbara drew a deep breath.

"And there is a bathroom opposite that no one else uses—"

Barbara came to an instantaneous decision. She would see Samuel and Sonya often, *very* often; in fact, every day. She would have them, and the room, too. And she would do so many things for Samuel with her superb new income!

"Yes," she said, "I will be glad to try it."

Mrs. Ordway nodded. "I need a new interest most awfully. I hope you have had a purple past and will tell me about it."

This was pure insolence, and Barbara repaid it in kind. "Purple pasts are my specialty," she said. "I have had dozens. I always tell them to inquisitive ladies, with a running accompaniment of music and with lights turned low."

Her hostess laughed. "If you can talk while you play you are the musician for me," she said. "I love that combination. It makes more noise."

It was settled as easily as that.

Mrs. Ordway was a woman who knew her own mind, even when, as she freely conceded, it was tottering on its throne. Within twenty-four hours Barbara was established in the new room with the adjacent bath, and the luxury of the latter attraction gave her a warming sense of comfort that grew each time she thought of it.

To her employer, who hovered 'round as she unpacked—"not because it's interesting," she freely explained, "but because I've nothing else to do," Barbara gave a hint of her entire content.

"If I don't come the instant you whistle," she laughed, nodding at the bathroom door, "look for me there. I expect to spend all my off time in that tub."

Mrs. Ordway's reply bridged the unspoken confidence. "It has been rather horrid, hasn't it?"

"Have you ever shared a tub with half a dozen others? Not at the same time, of course!"

"Good heavens, no!"

Barbara's lips tightened at the memory. "If it had not been for Samuel and his duck—" she remarked, darkly.

"That sounds cryptic. Who is Samuel?"

Barbara told her. Her employer dropped into a low chair near the open trunk before which the girl was kneeling, and visualized the pictures in the other's words—the lodging-house, the baby, the Russian girl, the downtown office, Mamie Leigh, Kate Martin, and the rest. She was almost interested.

Also her hot and tired eyes missed no detail of the unpacking, the unexpected perfection of the simple gowns lifted from the big trunk, the fineness of Miss Smith's lingerie, the imperfection of the recent laundering of that lingerie. Her first impressions were strengthened. There was something very unusual about this Miss Smith. She remembered that she had taken her with no references save those of Miss Bradley, which meant nothing. Flossie was an easy creature, born to be taken in. Mrs. Ordway realized that she must keep an eye on her new employee.

At half past six she rose and drifted to the door. "We will dine in an hour," she said. "Alone. And then we will go to a play. I will have Jepson telephone for seats." She glanced down at her mourning gown. "I go, just the same," she explained, as if in answer to a reminder. "I do anything and everything I think will help me."

There, in a sentence, was the speaker's present philosophy of life.

Left alone, Barbara inspected the simpler of her two evening gowns. It was still fresh and charming. She had worn it only once since leaving home—at the Loomis musicale. She deliberately dawdled over her toilette, enjoying every moment of leisurely dressing, her mind as busy as her fingers.

She recalled her parting moments with Sonya and with Samuel—the brooding, lowering look of the one, the fat, clinging arms of the other. She fully realized the precariousness of her present position. It might not last a week. If it did not, there was still Miss Bradley with the weekly six dollars, and there were always Sonya and Samuel to return to. And if it did endure, this work, she would have the afternoons for Samuel, and surely a frequent evening for Sonya; and possibly, later on, Mrs. Ordway would occasionally allow her to invite them to her room.

Also, far back in her brain lurked another thought, persistent and beguiling, which she refused to allow to take shape. As Mrs. Ordway and Warren were friends, probably, surely. . . . She shook her head.

"Idiot!" she muttered.

The first dinner with Mrs. Ordway was a rather silent one. That temperamental lady had sunk into one of

the black moods which later were to be so familiar. The new-comer met it with a quiet serenity which was like a cool hand on a hot brow. She monologued a bit, fell into a contented reverie over her dinner, spoke when anything occurred to her, and remained silent when she had nothing to say.

"I like your voice," Mrs. Ordway suddenly broke out over the coffee.

"Do you? I am glad."

"It's so warm and colorful."

Barbara was unimpressed. She had been told many times before that her speaking voice was warm and colorful.

"You sing, don't you?"

"No."

"That's odd. You ought to have a good contralto singing voice."

Barbara sighed. "I think so, too," she agreed. "I always feel ill-used when I remember that I don't sing."

Leaning across the table, the other stared at her with her hot eyes. "There's one thing I want to say," she added. "You're not deceiving me, you know."

The blood rushed to the girl's head. "I don't understand," she murmured.

"Oh yes, you do. I want you to know that I understand, too. Of course I don't know what the masquerade means. I merely know that it *is* a masquerade!"

"Don't you realize that conditions in life often change suddenly?" asked Barbara, rather faintly.

"Of course I do. What I can't understand, *yet*, is why there should be such a mystery about the change.

You talk of your life this winter with the utmost freedom, but you rarely mention anything that happened before this winter. Naturally, one notices that. The first night we met, you spoke of having been in Vienna. That's the only reference I recall to your purple past." Her slow, insolent smile grew. "What are you going to talk about when you have exhausted the winter?" she added, wickedly.

Barbara, who had already given some thought to this problem, was struck by its added force on the other's lips. To hide her confusion she laughed. "We will talk about you," she suggested.

Mrs. Ordway's blond eyebrows rose. "Then you don't deny the allegation?"

"No. Why should I? To seem a creature of mystery may add to my interest."

The other rose. "We will let it go at that," she conceded. "Now see if Jepson has the theater tickets."

Jepson, being an efficient butler, had them. He had also ordered Mrs. Ordway's limousine, which even then was waiting at the door. He paternally escorted the ladies to the outer atmosphere, and followed the chauffeur's motions with a cold and critical eye as the latter draped a rug over the knees of his charges.

The play was disappointing. Mrs. Ordway was bored, and revealed the fact with almost too great frankness, showing her disapproval by chatting freely during several scenes and by leaving in the middle of the last act. During the drive home she was in her black mood, and if Barbara had felt any fear that her new job was to be a sinecure, the illusion perished an hour later.

"Get into something comfortable," ordered her em-

ployer, curtly, as they went up-stairs. "Then come to my room."

When she obeyed she found Mrs. Ordway in bed, in an effective stage setting of dim lights, rose shades, open piano, and driftwood flames in the room's big fireplace.

"Can you play a great many things without notes?"

"Of course."

"In the dark, or, rather, in this dim light?"

"Yes."

"Good. Begin, then."

"What sort of music do you like best?"

"Everything. The louder the better."

The musician in Barbara shuddered at this heresy. She began, however, with Scarwenka's Spanish Dances, continued with some dance music she herself had brought back from Spain, swung into spirited Russian and Polish dances, crashed out Lizst's Second, Sixth, and Twelfth Hungarian Rhapsodies, drifted through half a dozen Chopin waltzes, and unexpectedly added some weird and haunting folk-songs she had learned in the Carpathians.

Occasionally Mrs. Ordway threw a brief sentence at her across the room. Frequently she moved her position or turned her pillows. She dozed and roused again. Twice, thinking she was asleep, the player tried to steal away and was recalled by an imperious order.

The gray fingers of dawn were touching the window-panes before Barbara finally got to her own room. It had been only eleven o'clock when she and her employer returned from the theater. It was after four when she faced the pale reflection in her mirror as she brushed her hair.

Six hours later, at eleven o'clock, she must be at Miss

Bradley's, where for two hours she must listen to that exuberant devotee of music passionately singing off the key. But even as her spirits sank at the prospect, the girl's self-respect rose from its knees and unfurled its dragging wings. There was to be no nonsense, no charity, in this new work of hers. She was to earn every penny she received, and—she exultantly knew it now by the ache of nerves and muscles—she was to earn it *hard!*

XV

LIFE AND LOUISE ORDWAY

LIFE in the Ordway ménage proved to be very much the experience Barbara had foreseen. There were days when Mrs. Ordway was almost charming, and there were days when she was impossible. There were nights when she and her companion had five or six hours of sleep, and there were nights when they had none at all.

From the beginning to the end of the association, Mrs. Ordway remained frankly and quite appallingly selfish. If she dismissed Barbara from attendance at three in the morning, in the hope that she herself could then sleep, she recalled her without a scruple at four, if that hope proved unfounded.

On one occasion she demanded incessant music from eleven to five. On another Barbara read aloud six hours at a stretch; and, as the muscles of her throat were unaccustomed to such exercise, she felt the effects for days.

Very frequently, between midnight and dawn, the two women rode several hundred miles in the limousine, circling Long Island or racing across New Jersey, while Mrs. Ordway, propped up with cushions, stared with her hot eyes into the restful blackness of the night, and Barbara talked.

Fortunately for her, she had known many interesting

men and women, and had listened to many strange experiences. On these she now drew freely, avoiding the mention of well-known names, but using the familiar stage settings of the world—London, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, Budapest, Petrograd, and bringing in her own adventures in foreign backgrounds less well known.

Like all the restless Devons, she had traveled much. She knew her world, and had a sense of dramatic values as keen as her sense of humor. As her livelihood was at stake, she made a study of interesting the unhappy woman who had employed her. Each morning before she left her room she sent her memory back over the years in search of episodes, amusing, dramatic, or tragic; and she exhausted these so rapidly that often during her morning review she felt herself raking the ashes of a dead fire.

She was helped, however, by the discovery that Mrs. Ordway, despite her air of insolent indifference, was really interested in the affairs of her friends. She liked, for example, to hear of Florence Bradley's practice hours; and while Barbara, loyal to both employers, repeated to neither any gossip she heard about the other, she was, of course, at liberty to speak of common friends who came and went, of Flossie's outbursts of song in the homes of these persons, of her tributes, as Flossie repeated them, from the stars in the musical heavens.

On one occasion Miss Bradley showed a slight curiosity of her own. "When is Bob coming back?" she asked Barbara, during the latter's first week with Mrs. Ordway.

"Mr. Warren? Has he gone away?" Barbara was surprised and showed it.

"Yes. He has gone West on business. Hasn't Louise told you?"

"No. Why should she?"

Miss Bradley's round face looked almost thoughtful.

"She must miss him," she mused aloud. "But I'll wager he's glad to get away. She imposes on Bob frightfully."

"Is he"—Barbara tried to restrain the question, but it came out—"fond of her?"

Flossie nodded. "He adores her. I've often wondered why. I suppose it's because he is really the only thing she loves. She never cared for Jack Ordway, you know."

Barbara changed the subject. She found it a singularly unpleasant one.

Several times Mrs. Ordway showed a peevish impatience concerning the morning hours with Flossie. She herself was certainly not entitled to them, and she never left her bedroom until eleven o'clock. But no morning passed in which she did not send for Barbara at least once, and frequently several times, before the girl left the house.

Often she desired a note written. Usually she ordered several telephone messages sent, though her own private telephone stood eloquently on a small table beside her pillow. Though her breakfast was served at her bedside at nine o'clock each morning, she gave no instructions for the serving of Barbara's breakfast, and the latter rose at seven to grace at eight the table set for one in the big dining-room down-stairs.

It was Mrs. Ordway's French maid who, without consulting any one, adjusted the little matter of having Miss Smith's tray sent up to her simultaneously with that of her mistress. The keen eyes of the Parisienne had studied this Miss Smith; her ears had been ravished by the per-

fection of Miss Smith's French. Moreover, Miss Smith knew and loved France—every inch of it. It was not fitting that such a one should each morning rise two hours earlier than was necessary, after playing the piano all night at that, and for what? For nothing. This conviction Susanne conveyed to Barbara on the first happy morning when she herself augustly supervised the service of the latter's nine-o'clock breakfast.

"Susanne," said Barbara, solemnly, "it is now April."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"The second day of October is a date exceedingly remote. But mark it well. For on that day, Susanne, you shall receive a gift of a richness and beauty unequaled in your experience."

"Mademoiselle jests," murmured Susanne.

"But no. Mademoiselle was never more serious in her life. You shall see, Susanne."

And when Barbara had risen, the name of Susanne went down with a note in a small book in which Miss Devon kept a certain list for action when she returned to her kingdom—a list headed by the names of Samuel and Sonya, and increased by many additions during the six months in Wade & Manning's circulation department.

There was, for example, Anna Hefferan, the girl who, on nine dollars a week, was supporting an invalid father and herself, and who nursed the helpless man by night and left him in the care of the neighbors during the day. Though they did not yet know it, Anna and her father were to be very well cared for after the second of October. Also there was Frieda Imholz, half-fed and wholly shabby because every cent she could save went toward the education of her only brother.

"So bright he is, that boy Max, you don't know it! And all the time he helps himself. Afternoons and mornings he sells newspapers. Now he got a job as usher in a theater, and after he gets home he studies yet."

The education of Max Imholz was an assured fact, provided for by a single line in Barbara's note-book. There were many other entries, including plans for the girls who were breaking down, and the girl whose doctor had told her she "gotta have that tumor out some time, 'cause it ain't malignant, but you can't tell nothin' about what it won't do." There was a tuberculous young clerk who needed a year in the Adirondacks and would have it. Sonya was to live at Devon House and write to her heart's content, and there was a charming little cottage on the Devon place where Samuel, under his mother's care, was to be educated and grow into a physical giant like his father.

If it were not for the memory of these and other workers, and for the poignant revelation of her own futile struggle among them, Barbara might have felt that she could not endure her present bondage. But against the rocky background of the past six months, her present shelter still seemed a haven, even on Mrs. Ordway's stormiest days.

She was clean. She was well fed and well paid. She was beautifully housed. Her weekly salary was clear of expense, and she put most of it in the savings-bank as a bulwark against the immediate future. That she, until last October mistress of her own destiny and of the destinies of many others, should cheerfully fetch and carry for another woman would then have seemed impossible. That she could accept uncomplainingly the

other's repeated insolence was a revelation, even to Barbara. She, who had imperiously demanded and been given her own way ever since she was a baby, was in complete subjection to another's will.

In the beginning her spirit flared up hotly against Mrs. Ordway's frequent and unnecessary rudeness; but she made no outward sign, and in a surprisingly short time she quietly accepted it as being as much a part of her employer as her insomnia, her blond hair, and her cold and haughty face.

Once only, and this during the second week, the two wills clashed. Finding her new slave obedient, the employer increased her demands. In addition to note-writing and telephoning, she began to exact small personal services, properly in the domain of Susanne. Where it was a question of running down to the library for a book, or of delivering a message from mistress to *chef*, Barbara cheerfully obeyed.

One night, when Mrs. Ordway was preparing for bed with the efficient assistance of Susanne, she suddenly decided that her new companion, and not her maid, should brush her hair. She put the request in the form of a peremptory order. The French girl's sallow cheeks flushed. Barbara hesitated.

"I have an idea your touch might be soothing," their employer deigned to explain.

Barbara brushed the hair, but she saw to it that her touch was not especially soothing. She did not overdo the matter; she merely brushed phlegmatically, tangling the hair once and pulling it once in the course of half an hour. Mrs. Ordway, facing her in the mirror, shot a suspicious glance into her reflected eyes, but the girl placidly plaited

the blond hair into two long braids and ended her work by pulling them forward, Indian fashion, over the owner's breast, as she had seen Susanne do. The central parting was not very even. The left braid pulled a bit at the roots. Mrs. Ordway never again asked for this especial service. Two days later, however, she demanded a new one.

She and Barbara had returned from a matinée and had gone at once to Mrs. Ordway's room, in which, surprisingly and for the first time, Susanne was not awaiting her mistress. That lady dropped into her chair with a groan of fatigue.

"Heavens! I'm tired!" she ejaculated. "And these boots are frightfully hot. Here, take them off!"

She extended a high, laced bronze boot. It was a good-looking boot, but for an instant Barbara regarded it with distaste. Then she turned and crossed the room.

"Where are you going?" demanded Mrs. Ordway, imperiously.

"I'm going to ring for Susanne."

She did so, and in the pause that followed she turned and faced her employer. Mrs. Ordway was angry. She showed it by her compressed lips and the high color on her cheek-bones. Barbara was not angry. Her expression was one of cool, good-humored tolerance. With a nod she indicated the still extended foot.

"That sort of thing isn't in my line," she said, casually. "You would find me frightfully awkward at it."

Susanne entered, on the breast of a stream of French apology whose swift current bore her to the feet of her mistress. Barbara left the room.

When she reached her own room she discovered that she was trembling. She had been stirred, after all, she

reflected, though at the moment she had felt so surprisingly cool. But the woman's command was intolerable. Probably not since the Middle Ages had a Devon been asked to remove another's shoes; and then they were kingly shoes, removed as a knightly duty. Under no condition, short of pain or helplessness on the part of her employer, could Barbara see herself removing Mrs. Ordway's shoes. Moreover, if she had impulsively obeyed this command, it would have been the prelude to more personal service, unnecessary, ceaseless, and in a way degrading.

She was beginning to understand her employer very well; in the light of this final episode her nature shone forth, clear and unmistakable. If this was to be the end of their association, Barbara would go back to the lodging-house and Samuel and Sonya, and live on Miss Bradley's six dollars a week, eked out by the additional dollars she was sure she could earn in the same way. She experienced a sudden respect for Florence Bradley. Miss Bradley kept her busy at the work she had engaged her to do. She did not expect her, Barbara reflected gratefully, to pause and do hair-dressing or manicuring in between. She felt quite cheerful as she dressed for dinner.

There was a slight self-consciousness in her heart, but none in her manner, as she faced her employer in the drawing-room five minutes before dinner was announced. Fortunately, a guest was expected and had already arrived —a tall, thin, austere man the hostess introduced as Mr. Clendennin, and who proved to be her lawyer. Later in the evening she learned that his chief function in life was to be surprised by Mrs. Ordway's expenditures—an easy matter—and to reason with her earnestly about them—

a much more difficult one. To-night, it soon appeared, the hostess and her lawyer were to have a business talk, from which Barbara was excluded by a casual nod.

With an evening on her hands, she took a taxicab to Sonya and Samuel, finding the latter asleep in his innocence and the former with a brow corrugated by thought. Barbara, superb in the more elaborate of her two evening gowns, seemed to illuminate Sonya's dim room.

"You look like a Christmas tree," commented the Russian girl, with her usual frankness. "Why are you wearing all those clothes?"

Barbara explained. "I didn't know I was to have the evening till five minutes before I came. You might as well get used to my radiance, though. I have to dress for dinner every night, and I shall slip down here every chance I get." Her face clouded. "If I stay, I mean," she added. "I may be leaving to-morrow."

She explained the situation to Sonya, revealing much more than she realized in the tale. At the end her friend nodded.

"You're all right," she said. "She won't fire you."

"She may. She was angry."

"No, she wasn't. She was merely surprised; and I think she had the decency to be a little ashamed, too. She gave the order without thinking, for two reasons: the first because she is supremely selfish, and the second because she has got used to depending on you. That's a good sign. She won't let you go. What's more, she won't ask you to do that sort of thing again."

"Unless she forgets," conceded Barbara.

"She won't forget. You have taught her a lesson. If she forgets, teach her another. Most of the women of

her type are born bullies. They must be handled as bullies are."

Sonya was right. Indeed, as Barbara had discovered, Sonya was usually right. When she returned at eleven o'clock, she found Mrs. Ordway already in bed and impatiently awaiting her.

"We're going to have a long session," she burst out, the instant Barbara appeared. "That idiot of a Clendennin has got on my nerves. He says I've already spent more than my income this year. He said the memorial hospital I'm putting up for Jack is costing twice what we had expected. As if it mattered! He likes to hear himself talk and to imagine he's important. Read to me first and get him out of my mind."

She had been right in predicting a long session. Barbara read for two hours, played for three more, and at five o'clock was recalled by the electric bell at the head of her bed, to give Mrs. Ordway a dose of the sleeping potion she took only after her worst nights. This was properly Susanne's duty, but Barbara had given it on the one previous occasion when Mrs. Ordway had succumbed to its need.

She immediately obeyed the summons and watched the swallowing of the dose with sympathetic eyes. As she took the empty glass, the patient's hot fingers touched her wrist in a little caress, the first demonstration that had passed between them.

"I'm a pig," said her employer, briefly.

"No, you're not."

"I am. But never mind; I'll probably keep right on being one. Now play the Balkan things for half an hour and then go to bed."

The sleeping potion, taken so late, meant that Mrs. Ordway would sleep till nine or ten o'clock. Barbara herself slept blissfully till she was awakened at nine by the entrance of the maid with her breakfast-tray. As she plunged into her bath and promptly leaped out again, she was conscious that her heart was singing. Sonya had been right. That little touch on her wrist, and the muttered, ungracious admission that followed it, had held the apology of a proud woman. All was well between her and her employer. She was not to leave.

XVI

RODNEY BANGS MEETS "SOCIETY"

"THEY say 'The Black Pearl' is a good play," Mrs. Ordway remarked at dinner a few evenings later. "It's a melodrama, but I've seen some good melodrama in my day, and I rather like it. We'll drop in to-night. If it bores us we won't stay."

It was after nine when they reached the theater. They had missed the entire first act of the play, a frequent experience with Mrs. Ordway, and one that disturbed her not at all. To-night it was quite possible that she would miss the last act as well. The intermission was on; the lights were blazing, and the lobby was crowded as they passed through it.

Barbara's young heart thrilled. She enjoyed these returns to her old world—a world so much her own that the abrupt entrance into it of a familiar face caused neither shock nor great surprise. She smiled collectedly into the suddenly arrested eyes of Laurie, who, facing her, was unsmilingly awaiting his cue.

Her hand went out and he grasped it. She had not meant to stop, but merely to pass with the smile and the hand-clasp, though she had not seen him for more than four months. But as their look held, something in the expression of her brother's eyes stopped her as if he had

uttered a cry. Laurie was worried; Laurie was unhappy. Not even the flash of interest over their unexpected meeting could conceal that.

In appearance he was, as always, a modern Adonis, perfectly dressed. But his face was haggard. All the elation, all the young triumph of four months ago, were gone. Her heart dropped like a plummet in deep soundings. What was wrong? She could not pass on until she knew.

Laurie, on his part, was experiencing a wholly different series of emotions. Before him was Barbara, no longer forlorn and unhappy, as when they had last met, but as radiant as in the old days at home. He did not understand, but the mere fact was enough; the why and wherefore did not matter. He had been worrying over her, and adding that strain to his growing anguish and anxiety over his play.

He was in the depths of the playwright's black pit of despair; and on ledges not far above him hung Bangs and Epstein and Haxon, each desperately clawing at the side of the pit, struggling to climb out, but, on the whole, inclined to let go and join him at the bottom.

None of them knew much about the world in which Laurie's play was laid, and only the overwhelming success of Bangs's "Black Pearl" made Epstein continue to consider the possible production of Laurie's play. He was in the painful position of a man who had grasped a live wire. It hurt like the deuce, but he could not drop it. He could only yelp for "changes" and for more changes and still more changes, until Laurie, as he explained to Bangs, had acquired the habit of rewriting his play in his sleep.

To him each rewriting seemed further away from his original theme. He had known what he was about when he began; he was afloat without a compass at the time when Barbara met him. Now, as he looked at her, a light flashed up in his tired young eyes.

"All right?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes. And you?"

"All right, too."

"Dear boy—I don't believe it!"

Barbara forgot the crowded lobby, and the curious eyes of Mrs. Ordway, who had been stopped at the inner entrance because her companion had the tickets.

"You look worried to death," she ended, dolefully.

"I am. But it's not about money. It's just work—that's all I can tell you!"

"You are *sure* you have enough! You are not—"

Barbara was recalling her experiences of a fortnight ago.

"Perfectly. I'll prove it by taking you and your friend to the Biltmore for supper after the play, if you'll let me." Laurie's eyes glowed. His mercurial temperament was exhilarated by the little encounter. "I dare you," he added. "Introduce me as an old friend."

She felt a hand on her arm. Mrs. Ordway was beside her, and the hand, instead of drawing her away, was firmly holding her in her place. She obeyed the tacit command.

"Mrs. Ordway, may I present Mr. Jones?" she murmured.

The eyes of Laurie and Mrs. Ordway met and lingered.

"I have been trying to persuade Miss Smith to let me take you both to supper after the play," he ventured.

Mrs. Ordway's indolent gaze drifted past him to

Barbara's face. "I think that will be charming," she said, languidly.

"Thank you."

The warning signal that preceded the turning off of the lights was given. Laurie escorted the two ladies to their orchestra seats. As he turned to do so, both observed for the first time that he was not alone, that modestly lurking in his shadow was a stocky youth in evening dress, with burnished red hair, whose eager red-brown eyes ran swiftly from Barbara's face to Mrs. Ordway's and back again. As he left them Laurie explained.

"The chap I am with is a new friend of mine," he said to Barbara. "I wonder if you would let me—"

"Add him to our little party? Of course."

Mrs. Ordway's interruption was so prompt that Laurie, who had merely meant to suggest bringing Bangs around for presentation during the next intermission, was slightly dazed. He murmured his thanks, however, and left them as the curtain rose.

That night, as usual, the house was sold out. Bangs and Laurie, who made a point of dropping in once a week to watch the performance and make sure the performers were not going stale or losing the right tempo of the play, stood in the rear during the next two acts, modestly forming part of a human frieze that lined the back wall.

"You ought to be working on another thing as good as this, instead of wasting your time on my play," muttered Laurie.

"Nothing like it!"

Bangs's determined optimism was the hardest thing Laurie had to bear. He knew the difference between

this loyal stand and the real thing. He knew, too, that Bangs would see him through to the bitter end, while there was one flickering light left, even though Bangs himself had conceived a new plot that, as insistently as a crying child, was demanding to be taken up. Again and again he had begged Bangs to forget him, to drop him if necessary, and to begin his own play. He could not renew the argument now. Instead he hurriedly changed the subject.

"We are going out to supper to-night," he said. "With those ladies I was speaking to."

Bangs's eyes stretched to their widest. He pursed his lips in a noiseless whistle.

"Some lookers," he said. He smoothed his hair with one nervous hand and felt his tie with the other. "Think I'm all right?" he added, hopefully.

"Of course. And say, Bangs"—Laurie found it a little hard to go on—"those ladies don't know anything about my work, and I don't want them to," he added, slowly. "So please don't drop the slightest hint about anything we have done or are doing. That's important. Understand?"

"Why, yes; but—"

"I'll explain some time. Meantime, mum's the word."

"But can't I talk about 'The Black Pearl' and all you did for it?" asked Bangs, half incredulous, half hurt.

"Not a word. If they knew you were a playwright, Miss Smith might suspect that I was heading that way, too. And there are special reasons why she must not suspect anything of the sort."

"Don't think I'll go. 'Fraid I'd give you away without meaning to."

Laurie reflected. It would be easy to say that his friend had a previous engagement for supper. On the other hand, he knew that Bangs wanted to go, that Bangs actually thrilled at the thought of the new experience as a child thrills at the prospect of the pantomime.

"I'll trust you," he said. "You have never gone back on me yet; I don't believe you'll begin to-night."

"But something may slip out!" wailed Bangs.

"Not if you watch your words. You'll find it's quite an amusing game to play—and certainly a new game to you, Bangs," he added, frankly.

It was. Most things that passed through Bangs's red head dropped lightly from his lips. That it would be an amusing game Bangs was not sure. That it would be stimulating he realized on the way to the Biltmore in Mrs. Ordway's big limousine.

Laurie and Mrs. Ordway did most of the talking. It was the kind of talk Bangs liked but took no part in. The girl too, Miss Smith, was rather silent, but she seemed immensely interested in his chum. It was an exciting journey, made apparently through excavations for a new canal. At intervals they bounded from their seats, jammed against the side of the car, or clutched one another in futile efforts to offer aid.

"Oh, these New York streets!" wailed Mrs. Ordway. "Will they never be fit to travel on again? The car of a friend of mine actually dropped into a subway hole last week, and it took half the police force and most of the fire department to get it out again. Then the chief reproached her bitterly for being on the streets at all."

As they turned into Forty-third Street Laurie took off his hat and reverently held it in his hand. Then he

solemnly removed Bangs's hat and offered it to that startled young man.

"What's this for?" demanded the playwright, suspiciously.

"We are passing the building where Epstein lives," explained Laurie, in hushed tones. "Epstein is a friend of Mr. Bangs's," he solemnly mentioned to his guests.

Mrs. Ordway laughed. She did not understand, but she liked this extremely handsome boy, and found him amusing.

At supper Laurie shone with his old luster. This situation of entertaining his own sister in the presence of two friends who had no suspicion of his relationship to her appealed to his dramatic sense. Combined with it, and the comfort of Barbara's changed appearance and setting, there was an added exhilaration in the puzzlement he knew she must be feeling. He ordered champagne for his guests, while he himself sedately drank Apollinaris. He had, of course, seated Mrs. Ordway at his right, where, during the first half-hour of the supper, he gave her his whole attention. Then she turned to Bangs.

Alone for a moment, in the gay and crowded room, the brother and sister exchanged a long look.

"Great fun, isn't it?" murmured Laurie.

"Great."

"Happy?"

"Yes."

Laurie raised his voice enough to dissipate any suspicion of a confidential chat.

"Do you ever hear from Miss Devon?" he asked, conversationally.

"Yes, quite often."

"She looked worried when I saw her last. I rather thought things were not going very well."

"They were not, then. I mean, she was not finding them as interesting or as pleasant as she had expected. But she is all right now."

"I'm most awfully glad to hear it. She's such a trump. It rather cut me up to feel that she wasn't happy."

"Who isn't happy? Do you expect any one to be happy?"

Mrs. Ordway was challenging him with her usual imperiousness. Bangs, new type though he was, could not hold her interest. She returned to Laurie.

"A girl Miss Smith and I know, an awfully good sort."

"Is she a fool?" asked Mrs. Ordway.

"She's about as far from that as any one I know."

"Then how can she be happy? No one is, who *thinks!*"

She dismissed the topic after that brisk summary, and turned again to Bangs.

"And her brother—what do you hear about him?"

Barbara asked the question lightly, enjoying the delicious fooling; but the boy's brow clouded.

"Oh, he's all right," he said, shortly.

"But is he, really? He is not looking well."

"He's trying to put over a job that's too big for him. That's all that's wrong with him."

Laurie spoke with unconscious bitterness. A thought wave had rolled over him, drenching him in the memories of fruitless work, of Epstein's discouragement, of Haxon's growing impatience.

Barbara shook her head. "It isn't too big for him."

"What do you mean?" Laurie was startled.

"No job, I think, is too big for him, if he really wants to keep it down and is willing to work."

"Oh, he's working, all right!"

"Then he will succeed. You see, he never worked before, and he can't possibly realize all that is in him until he settles down to real and steady work—not a glorious spurt or two, but long-drawn-out, solid drudgery."

"I suppose that's true." Laurie turned the idea over in his mind.

Over the coffee Mrs. Ordway had an inspiration. "Let us stay on awhile and watch the dancing," she suggested. "Have this table moved back against the wall, and perhaps when the crowd gets on the floor I will be able to snatch a nap."

Without understanding, Laurie obeyed her instructions, and he and Bangs and Barbara talked while the dancers whirled before them, and the eyes of Mrs. Ordway grew heavy and heavier and finally closed. In response to their questioning looks Barbara nodded.

"It is the only time she can sleep," she added; "when there's a noise or some excitement, or both."

"I see."

Laurie did see, more clearly than his sister had intended that he should. Mrs. Ordway slept an hour. Then, refreshed and in high good humor, she awoke and immediately demanded her car.

"Where shall I drop you?" she asked the two young men. But they bade her and Barbara good-by at the door of the limousine, and stood bareheaded, looking after it as it bore the women away.

XVII

MRS. ORDWAY VISITS THE UNDERWORLD

"WE are going slumming," announced Louise Ordway. It was a morning in May. A triumphant sun shone in the heavens; a light wind waved the tops of the trees in Central Park; mating birds wabbled uncertainly in the air under the weight of nest-building material too heavy for their small bodies; the Park crocuses and tulips had burst into exuberant bloom. At one of the broad windows in Mrs. Ordway's bedroom Barbara stood watching these wonders.

"Have you ever gone slumming?" added her employer.

"No. When are we going? This morning?"

"Of course not. To-night. From midnight on. It may be interesting."

Barbara turned from the window with reluctance. What she desired was to be out in this sunlit world, to walk in the Park, to feed the squirrels, to exchange smiles with nature. The proposed expedition to the slums left her cold. The slums! There was something hideous in the sound of the word, in the pictures of misery, vice, and degradation it called up. At Mrs. Blake's lodging-house she had dwelt on the borderland of the slums. It had been near enough.

"I have never gone before, myself," Mrs. Ordway was

saying. "I have often planned to go, but I never got 'round to it. The expedition has always fallen through."

Barbara hoped it would fall through to-night. She was depressed and homesick. The picture of Devon House and its great walled garden floated compellingly before her eyes. She wondered what luck Jan Vander, her Dutch gardener, was having with certain new bulbs he had imported a year ago from Holland. He was a satisfactory aid, that Jan. By cutting his sweet-alyssum borders in the height of their midsummer flowering he produced a second flowering that in late October still lay over the grounds like a series of dropped bridal wreaths.

She longed for Jan, for her garden, for her books, for the safe, beautiful shelter of her own home. There were almost five months more to live through before she returned to these things—five months of loneliness, of white nights, of Mrs. Ordway, of slumming. The slumming seemed the climax. It lay just ahead of her, as somber, as uninviting, as the five months.

"We shall have a rather nice little party," Mrs. Ordway went on. "Bob's friend, Fred Baker, who is the city editor of *The Searchlight*, is arranging everything. He is bringing a 'plain-clothes' man who knows the ropes. Oh, and Bob himself is coming, too. Did I tell you that my brother was back?" she ended, suddenly.

"Your brother? I didn't even know you had a brother."

Barbara spoke quietly, but her heart-beats had quickened. Louise Ordway stared at her. One evidence of her egotism was a conviction that every one knew all about her and her affairs.

"Yes," she repeated, impatiently. "My brother, Bob Warren."

Barbara dropped her eyes. It was done as instinctively as nature would cover them if an injury threatened. At that moment she could not meet the cool assurance of the other's glance.

"He got in last night, and telephoned me this morning, so I added him to our slumming party." She stopped, then went on, closely watching her companion's face. "He asked if you were still here."

"Did he?"

Barbara spoke indifferently, but the shadow over the slumming expedition had slunk away.

"You are Bob's protégée, in a way," added Mrs. Ordway, slowly. "Did you know that your coming here was his idea?"

"No."

Barbara was suddenly alert. If this were true, and if the brother and sister had discussed her, how much did Mrs. Ordway know of that first night in New York? Then her nerves grew steady. Bob Warren had told nothing she would not wish him to tell. Of this, at least, she was certain.

"Yes. The night we heard you play at Flossie's he was impressed by your music, as I was. You know you put me to sleep. On the way home Bob suggested that I give you a try-out. *C'est tout!*"

Barbara winced. Three times, in three crises, Warren had come to her assistance: on that fateful first night; at the time of Marini's death; now, again, to give this turn to the wheel of her fortune.

"But I should have thought of it myself," added Bob's sister, lightly. "I was looking for some one to read to me, and that momentarily side-tracked my mind. Other-

wise I would have 'beaten Bob to it,' to use his pet expression."

Warren, it then developed, was coming to dinner, with Flossie Bradley, Baker, and a youth named Merrill, who was also to be of the slumming party.

"We are to dress very plainly, in high-neck gowns," the hostess continued. She was in a good humor. She had slept more than usual the night before, and she was interested in the prospect of the coming night.

That evening, when Barbara entered the drawing-room just before dinner was announced, three men rose formally. Warren and Baker came forward to meet her, while young Merrill lingered modestly in the background. Later, young Merrill proved to be a huge pair of George Harvey spectacles, behind which a shy young man blushed almost unseen.

Barbara felt the quick, firm clasp of Warren's hand, saw the flash of his irregular teeth in his charming smile, caught the gleam of his blue eyes, felt the atmosphere of physical well-being that he radiated, and turned at once to Baker. She and Bob had not exchanged a word. Neither, apparently, could utter the banalities of a casual social greeting.

Baker was an overworked young man, with a knife-like edge to his voice and nerves and in the glance of his wide-open, rather bulging eyes. They were extremely critical eyes, eyes that had seen much, but they softened as they met Barbara's. He felt a strong admiration for Mrs. Ordway's beautiful companion, and a deep-rooted conviction that, as he freely expressed it, "she was having a hell of a time." Whenever he could he mitigated her sufferings.

His idea of doing so now was to draw her to the other side of the fireplace, casually present Merrill and immediately dismiss him, establish his charge in a big arm-chair, and devote himself to her entertainment. For no other woman did Frederick Baker so exert himself. He had begun to wonder why he did it for Barbara.

Wholly and quite unexpectedly happy, she smiled up at him.

"You're going with us to-night, of course?" was Baker's first question.

"Yes; Mrs. Ordway says so. What does one do when one goes slumming?"

"Gets bored to death, usually."

Baker was as frank as Mrs. Ordway herself. It was always an exhilarating occasion when he and his hostess exchanged opinions. For Barbara, however, he wore a guard on the point of his tongue.

"But I don't intend that we shall be bored to-night if I can help it," he went on. "The usual program, of course, is the Bowery, a Chinese restaurant, an opium-joint, a gambling-hell, and a dance-hall or two, all run more or less for exhibition purposes. To-night we're going to get a little of the real thing. We're going to see the criminal classes playing about."

"Do they play? I think of them as either actually 'cracking safes,'—that's the term, isn't it?—or sitting at tables in dark corners back of saloons, planning when to crack safes."

"You've been reading fiction, or seeing crook plays. There's quite a little world of crooks in New York, and they live alone in it as much as they can. About the only time they come to our world is when they want something

we've got—our money, our lives, or anything else they have taken a fancy to. Sometimes it's a girl that brings them. Usually they flock by themselves in their own restaurants and dance-halls."

"Don't the police know about these places?"

"Yes, usually; but that's another story. And there are always a few new and old joints they haven't caught on to yet. They're a tragic lot—the criminals. In books and on the stage they have a devil of a good time matching their wits against those of the police and getting the better of them. But in real life they're simply rats in a huge trap that is sprung often enough to keep them in constant, shivering terror."

Barbara shuddered. "I don't believe I want to go," she said.

"Oh yes, you do! They have their moments. And to-night, as I've said, we'll find them playing."

He enlarged on this theme at the dinner-table, where Barbara found herself at the foot, seated between him and Flossie, while Warren, on some sudden impulse of his erratic sister, had been placed at that lady's left. She talked to him exclusively throughout the meal, coolly ignoring her other guests, while Merrill, at her right, gave ear to Miss Bradley's monologue.

For the journey down-town, at eleven o'clock, Mrs. Ordway took Flossie and Baker into the car with Barbara and herself, leaving Warren and young Merrill to follow in a taxicab. It was not until the party had visited two so-called opium-dens, a restaurant and a dance-hall that Warren was able to reach Barbara's side. Once there he dislodged Baker with something of his sister's coolness, and remained.

In the first places they visited Barbara had been both interested and disappointed. Notwithstanding Baker's prediction, she found everything very much as she had expected it to be. The opium-den with its heavy-eyed inmates would have made an excellent stage setting for a play. Indeed, she recalled a Belasco drama with a stage setting much like it. In the restaurant her strongest emotion was a disinclination to eat any of the food set before her; and in the dance-hall a score of heavy-jowled dancers, swinging girls about in Apache fashion, were so obviously not the real thing that she was conscious of a growing feeling of injury. But even on the threshold of the next place they visited the sentinel at the outposts of her soul sent back a bugle note of alarm.

To enter it the party had warily descended a flight of dirty and unsteady steps, had made a tortuous way along a narrow passage lit only by one gas-jet, had gone through several dark storerooms, each with various exits, and had finally found itself in a huge, brilliantly lighted and badly ventilated cellar, evidently far underground.

Its brick walls were glaringly fresh with whitewash. Its dancing-floor was polished and waxed to perfection. Its music, furnished by a small orchestra of foreign-looking men in plain, dark uniforms, was perfect of its kind. On the floor forty or fifty men and women were dancing. Seen together they looked like any dancing assemblage, some of whose members dressed remarkably well and others badly. But an invisible wall seemed to rise before the girl as she entered—an intangible but protecting thing.

She did not wish to take six steps past that threshold. It was not, however, until individual faces began to stand

out that she fully realized the sinister atmosphere of the place.

Then, as she looked from one to the other, she had the sensation of enduring a bad dream. Almost every face was degenerate—low-browed, heavy-jawed, menacing, and now snarling. It was clear that the presence of strangers was resented. A murmur rose among the dancers. Many left the floor and gathered into sullen groups.

At the far end of the room was a bar, at which two octoroons incessantly mixed drinks. A third, superbly gowned, moved about the floor, her black eyes constantly shifting to the right and the left. Around her the discontented dancers collected, still muttering. Barbara looked for the "plain-clothes" man. He had disappeared. With a word of apology to his friends, Baker shouldered his way to the side of the octoroon, who was now standing in the center of the room.

"I'm afraid we're a nuisance here," he began, frankly. "We hoped your patrons wouldn't mind our coming. You understand, of course, that we are merely sightseers."

The woman shrugged her shoulders. She seemed at a loss for words. Baker had the usual masculine inspiration.

"Will the crowd join me in a drink?" he asked.

The woman's shoulders moved again. She muttered something in soft, guttural notes. Its meaning seemed to be that her guests preferred to pay for their own refreshments, but that the gentleman could do as he damned pleased about inviting them to drink with him. She had softened, however.

Baker's invitation was more tactful than it seemed.

It is not overwise for strangers to drink in these places, and they rarely do so. This stranger was willing to drink; therefore he had faith. He would pay; therefore he was generous. Half a dozen men moved slowly to the bar.

The octoroon moved about, repeating the invitation to those she met, and using Baker's words. "The gentleman eenvite us to dreenk *weeth heem*," she explained, with emphasis. Several women drifted toward the bar. Others stood aloof. But the murmuring lessened; the atmosphere grew more friendly.

Barbara, turning her head to watch the scene, suddenly stiffened to rigid attention. There at the far end of the bar, the goal a dozen dancers were now approaching, stood a very shabby, yet familiar figure. Its hair was ruffled. Its linen was not clean. Its elbows were braced on the mahogany counter. Its back was toward the wall. Its shoulders slouched. Its pale, lined face was turned toward the approaching line of thirsty guests, which it watched with heavy, indifferent eyes. It had the air of a hanger-on of the place, lingering by the bar in the hope that some expansive soul might "treat." Barbara stared, closed her eyes, opened them, and stared again. There was no mistake. It was her brother Laurie.

Warren caught her arm.

"What's the matter? Do you feel faint? The air in here is vile. Let me get you out."

"No—*no!*"

The world, reeling under Barbara's feet, slowly steadied. Her brain grew clearer. She tried to think, and unconsciously stared again at the tragic figure. Warren's eyes, following hers, fell on it, too.

"Why, there's young Jones!" he exclaimed. Then, feeling her start, he looked at her more closely.

"Do you know him?" he asked.

"Yes. But I—have—never—seen—him—like—that!"

Warren began to see a light. He stared hard at Jones. "He is not drinking," he declared, positively. "He hasn't been drinking."

"Isn't he? Oh, *hasn't* he?" The question came in a gasp.

"No. He is simply watching the crowd."

He saw the relief in her face.

"But he looks so dreadful!" she stammered, brokenly.

"H-m-m! yes. He does look rather down and out. I wonder what he's doing here!"

Mrs. Ordway's eyes were following theirs. "Why, Miss Smith!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that your friend, Mr. Jones? The young man at the bar? But, heavens! how he's changed!" She felt the electricity in the atmosphere and leaned forward. "He looks almost like a tramp," she added, slowly.

Warren frowned at her. "Let's get out of this," he said, imperatively. "The air is not fit to breathe. Here, Merrill, you take charge of my sister. I'll look after Miss Smith."

Merrill and Mrs. Ordway turned toward the exit, and Warren looked down at Barbara.

"What do you want to do?" he asked, quietly.

He understood, she told herself. He *always* understood.

"I can't leave him here!"

"Listen to me," he said, firmly. "You can't speak to him here. And you can't get into that crowd. It won't do."

"But I can't leave without speaking to him. I don't know where he lives. If I lose him—"

"I will put you in the car and come back for him. I *must* get you and my sister away from this place. It's a beastly hole. It was criminal of Baker to bring you here. Will you go home and leave the rest to me? I know young Jones. If he needs a friend, I promise I will look after him. Will that do? Won't you trust me?"

"Yes. I'm always trusting you. And—thanking you." It was all Barbara could say.

He escorted her to the waiting car and bade good-night to her and his sister, leaving them in the care of Merrill and the chauffeur. Then he hurried back into the dance-cellar. His absence had been short, but not short enough. The handsome boy in the shabby clothes was no longer there.

XVIII

MRS. ORDWAY REMOVES A PERIL

IT was past two o'clock in the morning when Mrs. Ordway and her companion reached home. The big clock in the Ordway hall had struck five before Barbara closed the door of her own room and dropped into a chair to reflect somberly on the events of the evening.

In the interval Mrs. Ordway had desired to talk, and forthwith Mrs. Ordway had talked—steadily and nervously, propped up on her pillows, her hands clasped behind her head in her favorite attitude, a spot of crimson on each thin cheek, and her hot eyes more brilliant than the girl had ever seen them.

She touched on the slumming expedition, which she lightly dismissed with the verdict that nothing "real" had been shown the party, except the dance-hall of the Three Quadroons; she described similar jaunts she had made in London, Paris, Vienna, and Budapest, throwing up a vivid scene in very few words, and changing to another theme with her usual and startling abruptness.

To Barbara's great relief, she did not refer to the surprising apparition of young Mr. Jones; instead, she passed easily from a discourse on life, death, and immortality to the latest novel, the début of a new contralto, the music of Richard Strauss, a dinner course her *chef*

had ruined, feminism, and the recent oratorical outburst of a rising American statesman.

Last of all, she spoke of her family life and her brother, and Barbara, who had listened but vaguely to what went before, lost no point of this final theme. For the first time, Louise Ordway was describing her childhood, her earliest associations, and her old home—all with characteristic detachment, as if lightly touching the life of some one else.

"I suppose my mother was a fine woman," she said. "I always respected her; sometimes I admired her; but I never really liked her. She lived in a world of her own, and she eliminated sin and suffering from it by the easy method of refusing to admit their existence. I suppose she was a mental scientist or something of the sort, but she never formulated her creed. Occasionally she invited Bob and me to visit her world, and we accepted if we could get there—but we never stayed long. The atmosphere was not normal for little humans.

"Father was a magnificent money-making machine. He made several millions, and worked harder for the last than for the first. Sometimes Bob and I met him in the halls or on the stairs of our house, and he usually nodded to us; but I'm sure he didn't know whether we were his children or the neighbors'. He did not care for 'brats.' He once told mother he was looking forward to taking some comfort with us when we grew up, but he lost most of his money before that, and died of the shock of the experience. The next year, mother was killed in a railroad accident in France. That left Bob and me alone, for we hadn't the uncles and aunts and godfathers or godmothers that hedge most children 'round. But in

one way we had been alone from our birth, so we didn't much mind the new condition. We had a guardian, who was my father's partner and exactly like him. He treated us as father had done. He gave us what we needed and ignored our existence.

"After mother's death her friends had a special meeting to plan our future. But Bob and I had a meeting first, as soon as we heard of the other meeting, and we made our own little map of life. We decided to live on in a house we had in the country, with two of the old servants; and we wrote and invited a distant cousin of our mother to come and live with us and look after us.

"She was a good old thing, so poor that the summons was a godsend to her. She hadn't much force of character, and we could easily have overruled her. But we were precocious imps, and though Bob was only fifteen and I was only twelve, we had thought things out. We knew our continued independence rested on our good behavior. If we got off the track in any way, the committee would meet, and our guardian would get busy, and all the rest of it. So we made a covenant with Cousin Virginia.

"We were to go to school regularly, to study reasonably, and to be in bed early every night. The rest of the time we were to do very much as we pleased—always, of course, keeping her informed of our movements. As the experiment worked out, we were really more independent than most men and women. Of course our social activities were curtailed by the fact that most of our friends were still in leading-strings; but we did not lack affection, for their mothers mothered us, too, and we were quite happy.

"We lived that way until Bob went to college and I went abroad to school. Bob was a wonder. He has a

splendid mind, and it worked in those days very much as it does now. He was equal to any situation."

She stopped and stared before her, as if she watched the long procession of the years, and the boy who was her companion as they passed.

"Something is worrying Bob," she broke out, suddenly, "and I'm not quite sure what it is. He has always told me his troubles before. This time he doesn't. I wonder why!' 'Her hot eyes searched Barbara's face. "How long have you known my brother?" she asked, abruptly.

"Let me think," Barbara reflected. "I met him first in October; then again at the time of Marini's funeral; and once—no, twice, after that. So, you see, I can hardly claim to know him at all. But I admire him immensely," she added.

The eyes that regarded her softened. "Bob is the salt of the earth," said his sister. The lights burned low. Gray shadows filled the room. "We've talked till dawn!" she added.

Barbara, who had talked so little, nodded. "Try to sleep now," she said. "I will play to you."

But the shadows had fled and the sunbeams had taken their place before Mrs. Ordway slept.

Alone in her room, Barbara felt the quick, cold approach of a wave of depression, and resolutely summoned her will-power to fight it.

"I will not let myself worry," she muttered between set teeth. "Laurie can't possibly be as badly off as he looked. He couldn't drop so far in so short a time. He was there to write up the place, or as a detective, or something of the sort. I will keep cool till I know the reason."

But a pitched combat between the will and the imagination is wearing to their battleground, the mind. Barbara darkened her room and went to bed, not to sleep, but to be racked by a contest in which will and reason were blinded by the pictures imagination held before her. When she dozed she dreamed of Laurie—of Laurie ill, of Laurie suffering, of Laurie imprisoned; in her waking hours she was unpleasantly conscious of a lurking reflection in her mind's background—a reflection she did not allow to take definite shape. She had done all this. . . . She had gone through so much. . . . Possibly she had been all wrong; . . . possibly every one else was right. . . .

Peace came with the morning mail. Two letters lay on her breakfast tray—one addressed in an unknown handwriting, which, strangely, she knew; the other in Laurie's dashing script. The latter she tore open. He wrote:

Dear Bab, Of course I saw you, but I couldn't amble up, looking as I did. Don't be worried. It's all right. I'm quite disgustingly prosperous, and I haven't had a drink since I struck the town. I was in that hole, in that make-up, for a special purpose which later I will explain. (Under the collar I *wasn't* wearing I felt hot to see *you* there!)

I'm glad to know where you are. It was easy enough to find out, after meeting Mrs. Ordway. But I still don't want to report till the end of September. And I've got to break our June first engagement, because I'm going out of town on business. I'll be back in a few weeks. If you change your address, send the new one to me on September fifteenth—New York Post Office, General Delivery.

It's a ton off my mind to know that all's well with you.

Your affectionate,

Laurie.

Barbara reread the letter slowly, weighing each word, and letting her spirit expand under the relief of its message. She knew that, fortunate or unfortunate, her brother, seeing himself recognized, would have made an effort to reassure her. But from his childhood Laurie had shown an aversion to lies. He used them sparingly, if at all, claiming that it saved a chap a lot of trouble to tell the truth. Laurie, really "down and out," would have sent his sister a brief, indefinite note ordering her not to worry. The definiteness of the statements in this note carried abiding comfort. A difficulty in drawing a deep breath, which Barbara had experienced since the night before, immediately disappeared.

She opened Warren's note with a smile. Like her brother's, it had been postmarked in the early morning hours.

DEAR MISS SMITH, Jones had gone when I got back to the hall, but I shall get in touch with him the first thing in the morning, as I know where he lives. Then, at noon, I will drop into Miss Bradley's and report to you.

In the mean time, *please* don't worry! Since thinking it over, I am absolutely convinced that everything is all right.

Faithfully yours,

ROBERT WARREN.

Barbara dressed to the accompaniment of a singing heart, and smiled at the world through her open windows. She smiled at Jepson as she left the house, smiled with great brilliance at Flossie's Japanese butler, and greeted Flossie with such spontaneous gaiety that Miss Bradley, herself in the austere mood which usually preceded her morning flight into the world of song, returned the greeting with resentful reserve.

"Something nice must have happened to you," she grumbled. "But look at me! I've got to sing at Mary Seton's tea this afternoon, and there's been a veil over my voice ever since I got up."

She rent the veil during two subsequent hours of lyric excursions into the "Eliland Cycle," and she was clinging to the last musical shreds of the "Anathema" when Warren entered the room. He crossed the threshold unannounced, and dropped so noiselessly into an easy-chair that the inspired songstress failed to observe him. With the accompanist, however, he exchanged a friendly nod, and then waited, his soul at peace, his eyes on Barbara's profile. When at last she discovered him, the singer paused, expectant of the tribute he hastened to offer.

"Great music," admitted Warren. "Not that I have much sympathy for that monk chap," he added, lightly.

"You haven't?" Flossie was pained.

"No. When a man loves a girl, his job is to get up and get her, no matter where she is."

"Take him away," suggested Flossie, sadly. "The creature has no moral sense."

Warren jumped to his feet. "To be taken away is what I'm here for," he declared. "I am the bearer of a message to Miss Smith. I will give it to her as we go."

He and Barbara left the house together. At the corner of Fifth Avenue Warren checked a passing taxicab.

"I am walking home," Barbara reminded him.

"No, you're not. You're lunching with me." He help open the door of the cab, now drawn up at the curb. "Get in," he insisted.

Barbara wavered. She wanted to go. "Mrs. Ordway will expect me."

"She won't an hour from now. She will suspect that you're lunching somewhere else. Louise is very intelligent. *Please,*" he wheedled. "You know I've got to tell you about that young chap, Jones."

Mentally, he was feeling a bit confused. It was quite plain that this morning she was not at all disturbed about the Jones chap, whereas last night she had all but swooned at the sight of him. However, it was great to find her in such a radiant and complaisant mood. She was entering the cab, and Warren followed and dropped beside her with a seraphic smile.

"Where to?" demanded the chauffeur.

"Oh—the farthest place you know of. Over in Brooklyn, I think, or somewhere in the hinterlands of New Jersey."

The chauffeur looked patient. His expression testified that he was used to these guys that got gay, but that he had never really loved one of them. He clutched the door-handle in a grimy paw, and looked past Warren's handsome profile.

"Where to?" he repeated, aloofly.

Warren sighed. "I suppose he's got to know," he told Barbara. "But how the deuce can he know when we don't know ourselves? I'd like to go to San Francisco," he added, longingly, "but I suppose you wouldn't."

"I wouldn't," conceded his companion. "But suppose we compromise. Suppose we go to the Park Casino?"

"Great Scott! That's only a few blocks away! We've got to spread this rarebit of joy over a bigger piece of toast than that."

"Go slowly up Fifth Avenue," he directed the chauffeur. "As soon as we have decided where we will lunch, I'll confide in you."

The chauffeur slammed the door and took his seat. The car started. The two passengers exchanged intimate and care-free smiles. Their eyes met and held a few seconds, and Barbara Smith experienced several quite unexpected emotions, of which the least confusing and the most lasting was an odd exhilaration.

"It's very good to be back," said Warren, gently. "Did you even notice that I was away?"

Miss Smith hurried into the background, and Barbara Devon took her place. "Mrs. Ordway doesn't let one forget," she told him, lightly. "She often speaks of you, you know."

He frowned. "Louise is a trump," he said. "But she's not an easy person to live with. I suppose she's really an extraordinarily difficult person, now that her nerves have gone wrong. I've wondered, constantly, how you were getting on."

"Very well."

"Really?"

"Really."

"I am in earnest," he persisted. "I want to know. You're sure you are not saying that because I am her brother?"

"No. We really get on very well. And I know now that I owe this work to you, just as I owe so many other things. I'm glad of the chance to thank you—again."

"Please don't. Tell me instead what the work is, and how it goes."

She gave him an outline of the day's routine. "It isn't easy," she added, honestly, "and I'm very glad it's not. If it were, I would think I wasn't earning my

salary. As it is, I know that I do earn it. We're awake practically all night, almost every night."

"That's hard on you—both. But I suppose there's nothing one can do about it."

He sat silent, turning over the situation in his mind.

"Isn't she any better?" he demanded at last.

"The doctor says she is. She's getting more sleep—perhaps four or five hours, all told, out of the twenty-four. One can do with that, you know. She gets it in snatches, while I am playing. When I stop she usually wakes."

"But how do you manage? When do you sleep?"

"Till breakfast-time—nine o'clock. Then I have my afternoons, for exercise or sleep, as I like."

He had an inspiration. "Have you been in the country this spring?"

"No."

"Then you are going to-day!"

"I don't think I—"

"Oh yes, you do; and yes, you can! We're going up to Westchester. I know a ripping inn there. We'll lunch in the open air and be simple children of nature; we'll listen to the grass grow and we'll watch the birds sing; we'll find pictures in the clouds; we'll roam the daisied meadows o'er and fill our little hands with flowers. Say yes."

"Will you bring me back early?"

"Any time you say."

"Four o'clock, then?"

"Four's too early! It's the heart of the day."

"Five?"

"Make it six."

"Half past five. Not a minute later."

"Very well. Now I'll tell this fellow where to go."

He gave his instructions to the chauffeur, whose stern features relaxed. A little country run of an hour, followed by a wait of two hours spent in congenial society in the inn's garage while his meter labored earnestly, was a program after his own heart. He indicated his approval by a spurt of speed that severely jolted his passengers.

Warren and Barbara lunched on one of the inn's broad verandas, with the panorama of Westchester's unique primitiveness before them. On the other side of the inn's low hedge undulating country roads ran to meet far-away horizon lines. Near the veranda an absorbed gardener presented a mighty back to their vision as he worked over the freshly turned loam of new flower beds. Above them waving tree branches flaunted fat buds, and on every side robins bustled, their plump chests bulging importantly.

Warren knew how to order a good luncheon. He displayed his talent on this occasion, selecting dishes with great care, demanding extra touches, and giving instructions in detail to his waiter. The latter he addressed as a man and a brother, an attitude which blinded that appreciative individual to the presence of other patrons in the restaurant.

"You are making a religious rite of this," observed Barbara.

"Why not? I am feeding a goddess."

"You remind me of Frederick of the Tour d'Argent, on the left bank of the Seine, and of the expression of holy calm he always wore when he watched us eat his famous 'pressed duck.' One day a friend of mine thoughtlessly

salted her duck. I expected Frederick to burst into tears."

"Did he?"

"No, he stopped just short of them."

"The most unexpectedly good meal I ever had," Warren recalled,as they waited for the *hors-d'œuvre,* "was in a ramshackle house near a desolate little fishing village on the coast of Newfoundland. Three friends and I were taking a fifty-mile drive—it was before the days of automobiles, up there; and we had been told to order lunch in advance, by telephone, at a certain place.

"When we got there our hearts sank. It was the most dismal spot imaginable—clean enough, but with oilcloth on the halls and the stairways, and a big, bare table in a room that might have been a monks' refectory. We knew we'd be lucky to get ham and eggs, but we expected salt pork and codfish. Instead we had melons, brook trout, broiled squab, chicken, wild strawberries, and Devonshire cream—all prepared in a way to make a French *chef* sick with envy. When I asked for the bill the woman said it was two dollars. I thought she meant two dollars each from the four of us, so I gave her ten dollars and she handed me back eight!"

"How did she do it?"

"That's what I asked her."

Warren was talking against time. He dared not stop. It was too wonderful to have this girl opposite him on a golden day like this! He wanted to tell her so. He wanted to tell her all sorts of beautiful things. His lips quivered under the words he dared not speak. He held himself in a firm grip and talked on—about food—while he absently ate the meal his waiter was serving.

"The melons grew in her own patch," he resumed. "The trout were caught in a near-by brook. The squabs she raised; the wild strawberries came from the woods back of the house. She herself was from Devonshire—hence the clotted cream. She ran the house alone, and it must have paid; for a week later I met her in the leading shop at St. John's, apparently buying out the place."

"One of my best meals," said Barbara, dreamily, following his lead, "was in Touraine, during a summer walking tour. Late one afternoon a storm came up, and my friend and I took refuge in a shabby little inn that seemed to be backing away from the village street with its eyes closed, for all its curtains were down. But we were led into an enchanting paneled room, with a big fireplace and a real fire, and a round polished table with tall wax candles. There a tottering old waiter brought us a dinner fit for the gods, ending with *petit Suisse* and the small, long *fraises aux bois.*"

"I had one memorable dinner in Paris," began Warren—"*chez Voisin,* when I was twenty-three." He stopped and stared at her. "*Why* are we talking about food?" he demanded, abruptly.

She glanced at him and her eyes fell. "You began it."

"I did not! You spoke of Frederick. But the idea of using up these precious minutes with you—"

"Tell me about the *Voisin* dinner," she interrupted.

For a long moment he did not speak. He seemed to have forgotten her question, in considering one in his own mind. If he spoke now, if he told her all that was in his heart, and asked her to marry him, what would she do?

That she would refuse him he felt horribly sure. But would she then go fluttering out into the world again?

Or would she still remain in the shelter of his sister's home and give him a chance to win her in the end? The answer seemed so obvious that unconsciously he sighed. It would be a caddish thing to speak. He must wait until that mysterious development of October first, to which she had referred.

"You were *chez Voisin?*" she prompted.

He accepted the cue.

"That *was* rather interesting," he admitted. "I was studying at the Sorbonne, and my chum and I had rooms in the Latin Quarter. He was an English boy—a fine chap—and he was taken sick at two o'clock one night with what proved to be a sporadic case of bubonic plague. No one could imagine how he got it. He died in fifty-six hours, and an old French doctor and I took care of him till he went. It was rather—horrible," added Warren, simply.

Barbara shuddered over the picture called up by those few words.

"When it was all over the old doctor ordered me to go to a certain room in his own house, drop all my clothes in a box I would find there, get into an antiseptic bath already prepared for me, dress in fresh clothes that would be ready, too, and then go alone to Voisin's and eat the best dinner I had ever eaten in my life. He told me to drink two bottles of champagne if I could do it, and then to get a room in a certain little hotel and sleep the clock round."

"Did you obey him?"

"Absolutely. Even to the two bottles!"

"And you escaped contagion?"

"Yes."

Their talk changed, but remained impersonal. After a little time Barbara rose abruptly. They had finished their coffee, and she did not like the persistent undercurrent of thoughts about those three days in Paris, that visit to the empty room, that lonely dinner, and all that might have happened.

"Shall we walk?" she suggested. "These Westchester roads are so lovely now."

He paid the bill and they started off—over a low-browed hill, down into the dip of a tiny valley, along a road with unexpected twists and turns, which branched into smaller roads, some leading to farms, others leading nowhere. Barbara had the sense she had so often felt as a child, of being on the verge of a glorious adventure. Something, anything, might lie just around that next bend of the road.

Suddenly Warren stopped short.

"Do you realize," he exclaimed, blankly, "that I haven't reported on Jones?"

"On *Jones!*"

For a second Barbara gazed at him as blankly as he gazed at her. Jones was a far cry from the enveloping beauty of this Westchester world. Warren, intent on apology for his own lapse, did not observe her lack of response.

"It's because, unfortunately, there's nothing to report," he confessed. "When I got to his room this morning I was told that he and his friend Bangs had moved about a month ago, and that the landlady didn't have their new address. She knew they had gone to some hotel, and she heard them say they were going West in June."

He waited, expecting at least some slight return of the

anxiety she had shown the night before. But to-day, he reflected, she was either very much on her guard or wholly indifferent. Barbara realized that he was watching her.

"I know," she said. "He wrote me. I had a note this morning. Everything is all right. But thank you for trying to find him."

Warren took that in silence. In silence they walked on, while he tried to smother the questions that crowded into his mind, the little doubts that tried to wriggle in with them. A row of trees came toward them, saluted them, and fell behind. Suddenly Barbara felt his hand on her arm. She looked at him and stopped, as he had done. His face was white. The wall of his resolution had crumbled.

"Barbara," he asked, "when are you going to trust me?"

"I don't—"

"Oh yes, you do! You understand. You know that I love you. You know that I have loved you from the first night we met, and that I haven't thought of anything but you since then. You know that I want you to marry me. Yet you keep me away as much as you can, and when we meet you greet me almost as if I were a stranger. You make me begin our acquaintance all over again. You know all there is to know about me, but you tell me nothing about yourself."

"Don't you trust me?"

"Good heavens, yes! Haven't I shown it? But I want *you* to trust *me!* I want you to let me help you. There must be something I can do. Barbara, Barbara, listen to me!"

He had her hands now, and they stood facing each other in the deserted country road.

"Keep your secrets if you must; but tell me the one thing I must know. Tell me that perhaps, some time, you can care for me."

"I can't tell you," said Barbara, slowly. "I don't know myself."

Warren looked at her, and now she met his eyes. He dropped her hands.

"You mean—" he began.

"I mean exactly what I say. I don't know. Everything in my life this year is so confused, all the values are so changed, that I—I seem to have lost my bearings. I'm not sure of anything."

"I see." Warren spoke slowly, trying to understand. He did not see at all.

Barbara went on, almost as if she were thinking aloud. He had an odd sense that she was trying to answer her own unspoken questions, as well as his.

"I'm immensely grateful to you," she mused. "Every time I think of you I see you as you were that first night—so understanding, so kind. And when Marini died—"

"Please don't. That hurts." Warren's voice was almost harsh. "In another minute," he added, "you will be offering to be a sister to me."

She shook her head, with a little smile. "No," she said, gently. "What I want you to be just now is a friend, an understanding friend, and—a patient one!"

His heart leaped, then grew heavy. "Will you promise me one thing?" he asked.

"If I can."

"Stay on with my sister. Don't disappear again. I couldn't bear that."

"I know." Her eyes met his. "I won't leave unless she sends me away—and I don't think she will do that."

"Thank you."

"And after the first of October I will answer any questions you care to ask me—on one condition," she added, quickly, as his face brightened.

"What is that?"

"That you won't ask any in the mean time; and that you won't—" She hesitated.

"Annoy you by making love to you?" His lips set. "I promise," he added.

The drive back to town was a silent one. In his present mood Warren could talk on only one subject, and that subject was now barred to him. At his sister's door he said good-by.

"No I won't come in," he explained, hurriedly. "I'd be beastly company at dinner. I will see you to-morrow."

But Mrs. Ordway had other plans. She had been thinking. She listened without comment to Barbara's cheerful report of the afternoon, and, though she seemed not at all annoyed, she was silently thoughtful at dinner. That night she was unusually restless, and by morning she had come to a decision.

"Miss Smith," she began, peremptorily, "we're going away to-day."

Barbara was startled. "Away?" she repeated.

"Yes, to the mountains. I can't endure this house any longer. It's getting on my nerves. Doctor Boswell has been trying for weeks to get me to go up to my camp in

the Adirondacks. He says I will sleep better, eat better, and all the rest of it. Well, *c'est tout.* We're going."

"To-day?"

"To-night."

Barbara reflected. "How long shall we be gone?"

"I don't know. Perhaps all summer. Or, if I get tired of the mountains, we will leave and go somewhere else. We might go to Norway, if you don't mind passing over the mines in the North Sea."

"I'm sorry. I can't leave this country."

Barbara spoke absently. She had not been sure she could leave the city, but Laurie had no such doubts. He was going away, and he was right. What difference did it make where they earned their living, if they earned it? And she was rather glad to leave the city just now.

"Very well," she said, cheerfully. "I will be ready to-night."

She understood. Somewhat ostentatiously, and very, very firmly, Louise Ordway was removing a Peril from her brother's path.

XIX

EPSTEIN & COMPANY

THE curtain had fallen on the last act of Laurie's play. It was the hottest night of a hot June, and the place was the hottest theater in a small city in the Middle West. The audience, which had sat through the production with languid interest, and with a patience stimulated by the cooling effects of numerous hard-working electric fans, now flowed sluggishly into the city's principal street, whose humid atmosphere urgently suggested that of the rest-room in a Turkish bath.

Five depressed figures lingered in the theater's lobby—Laurie, Bangs, Epstein, Haxon, and the local manager of the playhouse. The face of the local manager reflected a gloomy satisfaction. At the dress rehearsal of the play he had predicted a failure, and a failure had followed. The soundness of his judgment was apparent to any observant New-Yorker. Over the other faces hung veils of gloom.

The local manager broke a long silence. He prided himself not alone on judgment, but on being a good loser. He would now show these gentlemen that he was a worldling and a sport.

"Have a drink?" he suggested.

"No, thanks."

It was the playwright who answered, but the others accepted him as their spokesman.

"Well, so long, then," said the local manager, with robust cheerfulness. "See you in the morning."

The four men nodded, and the local manager faded from the lobby like a mist.

Epstein looked at his four companions with a critical eye. Then, with a grunt, he started across the street to the town's leading hotel, which appropriately faced the town's leading theater. Haxon kept close to his elbow, while Bangs and Laurie followed like mourners behind a hearse. They felt like mourners behind a hearse; they would have been willing to occupy a hearse.

Epstein crossed the hotel lobby, and, entering the elevator, indicated with a backward jerk of his head that the brief procession was not yet to disband. It obediently followed him, and stopped for review in his private sitting-room, whose open windows sucked in the hot air of the street and the night noises of the city. Still maintaining an eloquent silence, the producer removed his coat, and, waddling to the room telephone, gave an order for whisky and soda. Diving into his traveling-case, he emerged with a box of cigars. Selecting one, he lit it, after which he seemed to remember that others were present. He waved a vague hand in the general direction of the box, and, sinking into an easy-chair, removed his collar, threw it on the floor, and gazed reflectively at his shoes.

Possibly he expected that one of the three men in the abyss of depression before him would crawl forth long enough to unlace them. No one did. Haxon and Bangs were lighting cigars. Laurie was a thing apart, a lonely dweller on a dark and distant planet.

A bell-boy knocked and entered with the whisky and soda. At a nod from his master, Haxon did the honors, pouring drinks for the others, and setting a glass of soda on a table at Laurie's elbow. The severe tension of the occasion slightly relaxed.

"I think—" began Haxon.

"No, you don't," snapped Epstein. "You 'ain't thought for a month."

The tension tightened again. Haxon sank like a submarine into the depths of the conversational waters. Epstein studied the growing ash on his cigar end, and, following his usual method in moments of portentous utterance, finally addressed it.

"Well," he said, "I hope that now you fellas is satisfied. Perhaps now you see what I seen all along, and what I told you fellas all along."

"I see the storehouse," Haxon conceded.

His chief snorted. With eyes still on the cigar ash, he continued his monologue.

"I want you fellas t' un'erstand one thing. I ain't kickin' about the few thousands I lost on this play. I'm as good a loser as any man. What gets my goat is, I couldn't get one of you t' listen to me. 'Ain't I told you from the start what this play was? 'Ain't I said from the start it 'ain't got a chance? 'Ain't I had more experience than all of you put together? 'Ain't I picked plenty winners in my time? Well, that means something. All I got to say is, the next time you fellas listen to *me!*"

Laurie heard the words, but they meant nothing to him. They were merely notes in the strains of a great dirge that was beating against his ear-drums. He did not even look up. To Bangs, however, the words went home, un-

expected and unwelcome guests. His shoulders straightened, and in his tired, red-brown eyes a sudden spark showed and grew. Very carefully he removed his cigar and laid it down on an ash-receiver at his elbow. The act was portentous, and Haxon, who had seen it before and knew its meaning, endeavored to attract Epstein's attention by a warning cough.

"See here, Epstein," began Bangs, "there's no sense in talking like that. You didn't know any more than the rest of us about that play, and you don't know any more now. You predict a failure in every play, and if it wins out you say it's what you did to it that put it over. A few performances in jay towns like this don't give one much idea what's what. But if you've got cold feet, get out. That's all you've got to do."

Epstein raised his head and stared at him, ignoring the manner of the speech in the shock of its meaning. "Say, Bangs," he gasped. "You don't mean you want to go *on* with it? You don't mean you ain't convinced *yet* that you got a dead one?"

Bangs's jaw set. His burnished pompadour rose in defiance. "What I mean is this," he said, coolly. "I'm in this thing to the finish. If Jones isn't satisfied that it's had a fair try-out, I'm with him for another try-out. If you don't want the play, Epstein, some one else will. Or," he added, largely, "Jones and I will put it on ourselves. In the mean time don't talk to us as if we were a Sunday-school class. We don't like it!"

Epstein's jaw dropped. "My God!" he muttered. He appealed to Haxon: "Listen to him. Would you think it?" He shook his head over his cigar, regarding the ash broodingly. It was plain that he was grieved to the heart.

Far off on his burned-out planet Laurie caught an echo of his partner's words, and volplaned down to join the circle. "Thanks, Bangs," he said, simply. "But there's nothing doing in that line. I know when I'm through." He turned to Epstein. "I'm through now," he ended.

Bangs broke in before Epstein could reply.

"If the play is really a failure, it's up to me," he declared. "I'm the constructive man of this team. But you see, Jones, I wasn't sure of my ground. You took me into a new world, and—well, I'm a stranger there. That's all there is to it. You couldn't keep me in the right road, and I got you off it. Both of us landed a long way from home."

"There!" snorted Epstein. "You see! He says somethin'! Now if this young man lets me"—he regarded Bangs paternally—"I'm goin' to say somethin' myself. I got an idea."

He paused. No one spoke. He leaned forward.

"Now we get away from the whys and the whats," he said. "We don't look back. We look ahead. I lost a few thousand. All right. We forget that. Instead of thinkin' about it, we get busy and make more. Ain't that right? You two fellas start in now on the other crook play you got up your sleeve. Bring it to me the first of August. We rehearse it right away. We put it on the last of August. That's business, ain't it? Now you talk."

Bangs looked at Laurie. His red-brown eyes sparkled. His head went up like that of a hound listening to the distant notes of the horn.

"Bangs will do it," agreed Laurie, quietly. "But he won't need me on a crook play, any more than he will need wings."

He was prepared for an explosion from Bangs, but not for the simultaneous and disapproving excitement of the other two. Haxon began to speak, but Epstein silenced him.

"Hold on," he said, tersely. "Here is where I got the scene." He jerked his chair toward them, his cigar for once forgotten, his pudgy forefinger impressively pointed at Laurie's chest. "Listen," he said. "I'm a business man. From me you get the truth. It's fifty-fifty with you and Bangs. You got what he 'ain't got; he got what you 'ain't got. Alone, perhaps you would get over, perhaps he would—I don't know. But together—believe me, boy, you make a team. Stick to it." He turned to Haxon. "Ain't I right?"

"You are," said Haxon. He nodded to Laurie. "Sure thing," he said. "United you stand. Divided, it would be as the governor says—exactly as much of a risk for Bangs as for you. We all know you did some of the best work on 'The Black Pearl.'"

Bangs added his word. "It wouldn't be a risk," he said, calmly, "because I wouldn't take it. If Jones quits, I quit."

Laurie was moved and showed it.

"I have no idea of quitting," he explained. "I'm going to write plays the rest of my life, whatever happens to them. I've found the thing I want to do, and I've simply got to keep on doing it. But I don't want Bangs to be tied to me if he can do better alone."

Epstein rose. "Now we un'erstand each other. You go right to it, both you fellas?" he asked.

"We will," promised Bangs and Laurie.

"And you have the new play finished by August?"

"Sure thing."

Epstein's oblique eyes brightened. He waddled to the sideboard and solemnly mixed three drinks.

"Come on," he said, "we take another drink on that. And then," he added, delicately, "we all get out and go to bed."

In the dim corridor of the hotel the two young men lingered a moment at the door of Laurie's room. It was clear that Bangs had something to say, and equally clear that he found it hard to say it. At last he got it out.

"Jones," he said, "you know—you know I'm not a sentimental chap."

Laurie laughed. "I know," he agreed.

"Well," Bangs gulped, "I just want to say this much. If ever you—you drop me, you—well, you bust my mainspring. Got that?"

Laurie smote him on the shoulder. "I get it, you fraud," he said, affectionately. "And I'd bet the pile we're going to make that you'd have a new mainspring in about five minutes. Just the same—"

It was his turn to look self-conscious. He was not a sentimental chap, either. Bangs was trustfully gazing into his face, and the honest devotion in his partner's eyes brought Laurie closer to him in that moment than he had ever felt to a friend before. He dropped figures and ended his sentence simply and from the heart.

"We'll stick together, old man," he said, and with a good-night nod entered his room and closed the door.

They returned to New York the next day, and at nine o'clock on the morning after their arrival both were hard at work on the new play. As Bangs remarked, they had already "cussed and discussed" the theme. With and

without his chum, Laurie had gone on numerous excursions to the underworld, including the memorable one to the dance-hall of the Three Quadroons. Now the authors blocked the play into three acts, planned their settings, big situations and scenes, smoked like factory chimneys, argued violently, agreed and disagreed, contradicted each other, abused each other, and were wholly happy.

That was at the beginning. By July they were excessively nervous and edgy, and by the end of that month they were on the point of nervous exhaustion.

All day as they worked the heat of the city enveloped them. By night they were too exhausted to leave the house. Airily clad in pajamas, they lay on the single beds in their connecting rooms, shouting at each other through the open door, waking each other from restless naps to discuss "a new idea," dreaming of the play when they dreamed at all, taking no exercise, drinking quarts of strong coffee, overeating at times and undereating at others—in short, doing all the traditional, temperamental things such obsessed young animals would naturally do under the conditions in which they were living.

Epstein, infinitely soothed by the clink of twelve thousand dollars passing, as average weekly receipts, into the box-office of the theater where "The Black Pearl" still drew the public, was nevertheless nervous about the new play. He was making much on one play. That was no reason why he should lose much on another play. He was taking no chances that he could avoid.

It was his favorite diversion to drop into the boys' rooms and listen to the play as it progressed. During these visits he eased his mind of its burden of theatrical theories. He found fault, he demanded "changes," and

A few men could be seen moving about the houses. At either extremity of the dam a man was posted, walking back and forth with ceaseless vigilance.

"No surprise to-day," said Van. "It 'll be fight from the word go."

"Hustle up and say it," muttered an impatient warrior. "We're fifty to fifty. No need waitin' for that other bunch."

"No need, maybe, but they've earned their share in this. We can't cheat 'em out of it."

"Somethin' movin' down the valley," said a man at Yard's elbow.

Yard looked. There was unmistakable movement, hidden, he hoped, from the eyes of the watchers. But fortune was not with him. Suddenly a guard threw up his arm and shouted, shouted and began to run down the precipice of the dam. Instantly men boiled out of the largest of the houses. One man separated himself from them, bearing something in his arms. Yard could not see what, but he did recognize the man as Langlois. And Langlois deposited his burden on the ground and stood motionless beside it.

There was no reason for delay. The element of surprise was abolished.

"*Go!*" Yard shouted, and his fifty leaped to their feet and charged furiously down the hill.

CHAPTER XXII

THE postmaster came stumbling, staggering up the road to woods headquarters, his old legs, his age-enfeebled body, using the last remnant of their strength to carry him to the door, and he fell against it panting and exhausted. He kicked it, pounded on it with his fists, would have shouted, but there was no breath for that. Then suddenly he sat down, collapsed.

Svea came to the door. "Postmaster!" she cried, bending over him. "What is it? . . . What's the matter?"

"Yard!" he panted. . . . "Telephone. Quick!"

"Yes—yes. What shall I tell him? What's the matter?" In her anxiety she shook the little old man. His heart was beating with thumps that bade fair to burst it; the gulping breaths he drew permitted scant speech.

"Dynamite!" he said. "He's goin'—to rush—the dam. . . . Maybe—he's gone. . . . He don't know. Fifty men there. Tell him. . . . Langlois—got dynamite planted. . . . We saw it—on the stage."

She had rushed to the telephone, was turning the handle of the old-fashioned instrument frantically. Central responded.

"Camp Eight—give it to me quick!" said Svea.

Then she waited. There was no response. Again she turned the little crank.

"I'm ringin' them," said Central. "They hain't answered."

"Ring them hard—hard."

Still there was no response.

"Can't git anybody to answer," said Central. "Guess they hain't there."

"Keep on trying," pleaded Svea. "It's a matter of life and death."

But it availed nothing. Camp Eight would not answer. It was not because the camp was deserted. Big John had talked to Yard a few moments before, and now Yard was making his brief speech to the assembled roughnecks. The insistent ringing of the telephone passed unnoticed, disregarded. These men had something to do now besides answer telephone calls. . . .

Svea dropped the receiver and ran to the door.

"Father!" she called. "Father!"

Nord came to the barn door, and in answer to her frantic summons started to run to the house. She gave him no chance to ask questions.

"Van Yard is going to rush the dam," she said. "To open the gates. . . . They've got fifty men there—and he doesn't know it—and there's dynamite. It's set . . . Langlois!"

"That Frenchman 'll use it, too," said Nord. "My Gawd! Svea, what 'll we do?"

"I tried to telephone, but I can't get them. Maybe they've started. . . . We've got to warn him."

"I'll hitch up and—"

"No time for that. . . . We'll take the short cut over the hills. That way we'll save half an hour."

"I'll go. . . . Gimme my Mackinaw."

"I'm going, too. One of us might—have something happen. I'm going—I've *got* to go, dad. . . . I couldn't stay here."

He did not try to dissuade her. In a moment she was ready in boots and Mackinaw.

"Hustle," quavered the postmaster. "Git a move on."

They started, swinging away from the road and heading for the dam through the woods, taking the straight line. "Hurry! . . . Hurry!" urged Svea.

"Save your breath," snapped Nord.

Up the hill they scrambled, stumbling over rocks, worming their way over entanglements of slashings where there was no stable footing, only

dead branches that broke under their feet. Along the slope they went, drenched now, mud-covered. They splashed through brooks, heedless of depth. Silently they went, every energy bent to making haste.

Svea kept abreast of her father, and he was urging himself to the utmost. It was no child's play, this, but grueling, exhausting labor, not without its painful aspects. Svea's hands were bleeding; a welt showed across her face where a suddenly released branch had punished her.

It was not a matter of one mile or two, and on the heights there still remained snow to impede their way. They floundered through it, pushing on, on, urging themselves beyond their normal strength.

The strain told. Nord, not in the best condition from weeks of comparative idleness, was puffing and in distress—he began to lag.

"Hurry! . . . Hurry!" urged Svea, and he quickened his steps. She did not lag. Even though each step seemed to spend the last effort of her body, she forced herself on.

Now they crossed the height of land and saw below them the dam, still distant. They would emerge at the opposite end of the structure from the one Yard was to attack. The sight of it encouraged them, gave them new strength, and they plunged downward. . . .

They were running now, for they saw they were not too late. Then, down the valley, Svea caught sight of moving men. It was the fifty from Camp Seven. The attack was approaching. On the dam she saw the guards posted—facing the other way, for only from that direction was attack to be feared. . . . Now she was on the dam itself. The problem was to cross. Would she be allowed to cross?

Then she saw the guard throw up his arm, heard him shout, saw men pour into the open, Langlois among them, bearing a box in his arms. He ran apart and set his box on the ground. . . . Svea recognized it. She had seen it the day before on the seat of the stage. It was the electrical contrivance for loosing the dynamite.

"Dad!" she cried. "Langlois!—the battery!—there!"

Suddenly Yard and his men broke cover and charged.

"Quick, dad, that battery," Svea pleaded, and Nord started again to run. Svea followed, but now she could not equal her father's pace.

She saw him plunge down the face of the dam; run toward the threatened danger; saw him pause an instant near a pile of wood, and then run on, an ax in his hand. Breathlessly, hand pressed to

heart, she watched—watched, too, the approach of Yard and his men.

At every step they might stand above that explosive—any instant Langlois's waiting hand might throw the switch. . . . But she could not shut her eyes. . . . Her father was close now, unobserved. All eyes were directed to the charging men. Fifty feet, thirty, ten, Nord had to go. . . . He was there, leaped tigerishly on Langlois, struck him mightily so that he staggered, tripped, fell. Svea cried aloud in exultation.

In that instant she was proud of her father. For the wrong he had done he was making payment, handsome, manly payment. Her eyes glowed as she saw him stand over the battery, legs braced, ax swinging about his head. A circle of men formed about him—not approaching too near. . . . She saw him move the wires that led to the dynamite, with his foot—he was spreading them apart. Then he brought down his ax twice, once for each wire; swung it aloft again, and the sound faintly reached her ears as he demolished battery and switch with a blow. . . . That danger was gone now, and her father had accomplished the thing. Her father!

She sank to the ground, trembling, watching the advance of Yard's men, watching her father. Something flew through the air—a stone. Her

father staggered, but remained menacingly erect. Another missile found its mark; then a billet of wood, hurled from behind, brought him to his knees. . . . Then he disappeared under a mass of men. . . .

Svea covered her face.

CHAPTER XXIII

AS Yard descended upon the gate-house with his men at his back he took stock of the defenses—the visible defenses. These were simple, consisting of half a dozen strands of barbed wire supported by stout posts, which circled the gate-house. This would prove an unpleasant obstacle, narrow enough in its diameters to permit adequate defense by fifty men.

He saw Nord, without recognizing him, run down the face of the dam. What he did, the action of that moment, was hidden from him by surrounding figures, but these hurried away, sent by some order, and entered the stockade. From what cataclysm he had been saved Yard did not know.

The fifty from Camp Seven burst into the open, and it became a headlong race for the honor of reaching first the barrier and striking the first blow. There was no time for generalship here, Van recognized with regret. No order of his would stay his men, for the lust of battle was

upon them, the scent of combat sweet in their nostrils. With a joyous tumult of war-cries in more than one tongue, the roughnecks roared down upon the mercenary defenders and battle was joined.

Over the barbed wire club met club, fighting-man met fighting-man, and the advantage lay with the defenders, for their numbers were adequate to the space occupied—with a small reserve. Yard's men impeded one another, for none would hang back to give another a chance. They did themselves more damage than they did the defenders, who fought methodically, in a business-like manner, and well earned their pay.

That the attack was futile Yard recognized, but he could not call his men off—not yet. They were being punished, but were taking their punishment greedily, struggling, snatching one another back to get closer to that barrier of wire. . . .

From the dam above Svea Nord looked down on that swaying, shouting, seething ring—then to the inert body of her father lying at a distance, and wondered what manner of created thing man might be; how he could cast off in a moment the inherited traditions of centuries, the accumulated restraints of generations of ancestors, and become a heartless, pitiless fighting creature, bringing the aid of every nerve and sinew to the task of bat-

tering, beating to the ground other creatures of like form and semblance. . . . Her anxious eye could single out Van Yard, fighting as the rest, and she could not, did not strive to repress the thrill of exultation she felt in the prowess of the man—*her* man.

Slowly, grudgingly, snarlingly, Yard's men were driven back from the fence—to the length of a pick handle. They were beaten, could not reach their prey, safe behind that seemingly frail intrenchment. They were not joyous now, but morose, savage—preying animals balked of their meat.

"If you've got enough of it for a minute," Yard shouted, "draw off."

But it was not to be done without another charge. Again they beat vainly against that inner circle of men and wire; again were forced to give up the effort.

"Not much!" shouted Yard, putting command into his voice. "Here! To me!"

This time they obeyed. Brute force was defeated; generalship might try its hand.

"We can't get 'em while that wire stands," Yard said, as they gathered about him, some bleeding, all tattered, bruised, bearing marks of the *mêlée*. "Got your mouths full of it? Ready to take orders now?"

"Let her rip," said the leader of Camp Seven's fifty.

"They can hold us as long as that wire's there. A dozen of you scatter and find planks or timbers —a couple of six-inch tree trunks 'll do if you can't find anything else. . . . Get a move on."

The men hurried off on their errand, with jeers and catcalls following them from the ranks of the victorious defenders.

"Garrity," said Yard, "when we get the stuff you go with your gang to the opposite side. I'll take 'em here. If they get plank we can use it to flatten the wire down, and the timbers for battering-rams. Line up a dozen men to a timber and go at them where the wire's out of the way. Don't bother to stop and fight—your fellows back of you will tend to that. Smash through to the gate-house—it's the gate-house we want—and open the gates."

"Good man!" said Garrity. "'Tis a love of an ijea. 'Twill wor-rk."

Curiously, jeeringly, the defenders watched the dozen men return with half a dozen two-inch planks and a couple of six-by-six sticks of good length.

"Slam your planks down hard," said Yard, "and stand on them. Hold them down. Don't let those fellows throw them out. . . . Then

the men with the timber rush it. Go to it now."

Yard waited for Garrity to get into position, shouted, "Now!" and went at the wire again. His men slammed down their planks, ripping the wire clear off the posts and beating it to the ground. Then, obeying orders, they planted their feet firmly on the planks, holding them against the efforts of the defenders to heave them up and cast them away.

"Give it to them now!" Yard shouted, grabbing a place at the front of the gang holding the timber. "*Run!*"

Ten feet of hardwood protruded in front of them, a compelling ram, and there was no jeering from the defenders when it bore down on them. Straight through the opening Yard charged, and into the midst of them. There was no withstanding the rush, and a way was opened for them, but instantly the ram was past the defenders closed in, fighting mightily.

Yard's one thought was to scramble through the scrimmage to the clear space inside the circle —toward the gate-house. Clubs rose and fell, men grunted and cursed. More than one man was down, in danger of being trampled on by friend or enemy. Yard fought single-mindedly to force his way through. He did not care if he in-

flicted damage or not; to get through was his business, and with fist and pick handle he strove to accomplish it. It was hard fighting, a press, squeezing the men at the center of it breathless. It was all but impossible to move, to raise arm to kick with foot—as impossible for those who tried to hurl out the attack as for those who attacked.

It was breast to breast, a jostle, hot breath mingling with hot breath. Fair play, the rules even of rough-and-tumble, which knows few rules, were cast aside. Men gouged, lifted knees wickedly against opposing stomachs, lashed out with heavy boots at exposed shins.

Slowly, very slowly, Yard wriggled and buffeted forward, was conscious of an urge behind him, and knew that the full weight of his fifty was thrown into the breach in the wire. They were pressing him on.

At last he shot out of the seething mass, as a log will dart out of a breaking log jam—out on the side he had fought to reach. He stumbled, fell headlong, leaped to his feet, unnoticed for the moment, for all behind him were occupied, and hurled himself toward the gate-house. Across the ring he saw that the other attack had failed, was halted, the ram thrown to the ground.

The door of the gate-house was shut, locked,

but his calked boot sent it from its hinges. Inside he saw the engine that operated the gates, saw switches, levers, but, now that he had arrived, he did not know which one to touch, which one would work his purpose.

There was a single guardian—Pete, the jumping Frenchman—and Van recalled his peculiarity.

"*Pete,*" he shouted, imperatively, "*open the gates!*"

"Pete, open the gates. . . . Pete, open the gates," repeated the man, mechanically, and mechanically threw a lever.

In an instant Yard was upon him; one heartily delivered blow disposed of that man for the day, and Yard stood waiting, listening. There was a roar as of an explosion, a rumbling, a swishing —the babel of pent waters suddenly released. From above Svea Nord saw a mass of yellowish white foam thrust its nose from the mouth of the tunnel, filling the channel from bank to bank, thundering, roaring downward. The gates were open, the waters released. The thing Yard had come to do was accomplished. . . . She gloried in his achievement. . . .

Yard stood until he was certain, then with a huge wrench he attacked the mechanism, smashing switches, controls, disabling the engine. When he was through no injunction issued by any court

could close that dam; defeat of his men could not close it; however victory turned in the battle that roared outside, the objective had been reached. The gates of the dam would not close again for many a day.

Relief is unnerving after long strain. Suddenly Van felt puny, tired, weak, and steadied himself against the wall. Sulphate-pulp was safe; that fight was over, and the drive would go on. Pulp wood would ride to the mills on the breast of that flood, bringing safety to the enterprise, certainty of success.

He had done it—*he!* Memory flashed backward. He saw himself in a bums' lodging-house among other bums! Saw himself in the day of his degradation! The man he saw he did not recognize, perceived no relation with him in thought, motive, soul. He, Van Twiller Yard, was not that man. He was a *man.* He recognized it, was entitled to recognize it, for it was his reward. . . .

Sulphate-pulp! . . . It would live; it was annexed to his country, and he had done his part in the campaign. A deep breath of gratification, of realization, filled his breast; he stood erect before God and man, knowing that his work had been well done.

Then he plunged out again to do his part in

XXI

THE DEVONS MAKE A REPORT

AT precisely seven o'clock on the evening of the thirtieth of September Barbara and Lawrence Devon met in the lobby of the Ritz. One glance at each satisfied the other. Laurie glowed as if from an inward fire: he had the air of one drunk with the joy of life. Indifferent to the presence of curious strangers coming and going around them, Barbara caught both his hands.

"Oh, Laurie!" she cried. "You've won! I know you've won! Tell me how. I can't wait! Tell me all about it!"

From his superior height her brother smiled down at her. "You shall have the whole story," he promised, as he led the way to their table. "But I want yours first!"

"Oh, Laurie!"

"Please, dear. I have a very special program, and I want you to follow it. While we are dining you are to tell me your story. Then we're going to the theater."

"But I want to talk! I want to hear you talk!"

"You'll hear me talk, all right. You can't shut me off, once I get started. But, Bab"—he returned to the wheedling tones of his small boyhood, tones to which his little sister had always yielded—"I want my way in this," he begged.

"Of course, dear. I won't ask another question."

They dined, and Barbara talked. It was a banquet that dimmed the memory of the famous dinner in Touraine. Some of its dishes went oddly with Barbara's recital of her first months in New York. For she concealed nothing. More vividly than she had ever drawn them for Mrs. Ordway, she threw up for Laurie the scenes and persons of the lodging-house, of Wade & Manning's big establishment, of the little Italian hotel, of Marini's last days. Beginning with her first night in New York, she told of the loss of her money, of the appearance of Robert Warren, of the experience of the next day at the house in the Fifties.

Laurie had ceased to eat. He sat very still, his elbows informally on the table, his brilliant eyes on his sister's face. Twice they filled; several times he grew slightly pale. Once, unconsciously, he sent his hand down on the table with a force that shook the glasses and brought two startled waiters to his side.

"God! what a cad I was!" he muttered. "To let you do it! To let you take such chances! I'll never forgive myself!"

Barbara leaned toward him and laid her hand on his.

"Listen, Laurie," she said. "I want you to remember what I say. To do what we hoped to do for you is worth fifty episodes like this. But even aside from that consideration, the whole year has been the biggest and the most valuable experience of my life. There's simply nothing I would take for it. It has taught me more than I could have learned in any other way—and you know, and I know, that I needed my lesson just as badly as you needed yours."

Laurie shook his head. He found it difficult to speak. Barbara went on.

"Why, the friendship of Sonya alone is worth the whole effort," she said. "I shall never let her go out of my life. And the discovery of Samuel! Any one of a dozen experiences, as I look back on them, was cheaply bought by this year. Oh, I'm content! I'm gloriously happy over it all!"

She and Laurie were eating English sole with white-grape sauce when she described her luncheons with Mamie Leigh; and it was over a breast of partridge that she told of occasional Friday evenings when, her money being exhausted, she did not eat at all. "But from the time I moved to Mrs. Ordway's everything went very well," she said, as she began the piquant details of that episode.

The dinner was hurried a bit at the end. Laurie, it appeared, was determined to reach the theater before the curtain rose on the first act. He referred almost irritably to persons who dawdled over coffee. Barbara left hers untasted and rose with an unconscious sigh. She had longed for a whole evening of talk with Laurie; the prospect of a play in just these conditions left her cold.

She forgot the little grievance, however, in the unexpected interest of the drama. Like "The Black Pearl," "The Man Above" was a crook play; but it was better written, swifter moving, more brilliant, and more intense than that great success. A house filled from the orchestra to the last rows of the top gallery laughed and sighed and thrilled, as scene followed scene, and fiercely argued over the dénouement during the intermissions. When the curtain had fallen on the first act Laurie turned to his sister with a queer look of excitement in his brilliant eyes.

"Like it?" he asked.

"It's splendid," said Barbara, sincerely. "I've never

seen a more interesting play of the kind. That scene under the river actually chilled my spine. I don't feel warm yet!"

She laughed at herself and Laurie laughed with her. He led the talk back to Mrs. Ordway and the summer days in the mountains—the point her story had reached when they left the Ritz; and during the succeeding intermissions he kept her to the same topic. But now she saw that he hardly heard her. He was restless, almost absent-minded. She began to feel hurt.

Toward the close of the last act he felt her straighten suddenly, and saw her lean forward, staring intently at the stage. The last scene of "The Man Above" was laid in a setting Barbara recognized—the sinister setting of the dance-hall of the Three Quadroons.

The curtain fell and the light flashed up. Looking at his sister's excited face in the sudden glare, Laurie regretfully told himself that Barbara had beaten him to it! Her brain had leaped ahead of the revelation he had still to make. Episodes unimportant in themselves she had pieced together. Laurie had not given her a program, but had told her who the actors were. Now she bent and searched the floor in a feverish effort to find one the man next to her had dropped. Her brother put his own program into her hand, and answered her unspoken question.

"Yes," he said, with an effort to speak calmly, "my play—Bangs's and mine."

He showed her the two names under the title. He had expected excitement, triumph, and the unselfish delight his sister had always shown in any success of his. What he had not expected was a sudden gulping, wrenching sob,

and a rush of tears. Not since he was a boy had he seen Barbara cry. He stared at her aghast, pulled her to her feet, and, for a moment, in the crush of the rising, moving throng around them, felt her face pressed against his shoulder. The next moment she was herself, smiling at him through her tears.

"Laurie," she gulped, "forgive me. I couldn't help it. It's too wonderful! I never was so happy in my life! I shall never be so happy again!"

He pressed her arm. "Then we'll make the most of this. Now come to supper and I'll tell you how it all happened."

They parted on the steps of Mrs. Ordway's town house, at two o'clock in the morning. As Laurie fitted Barbara's latch-key into the lock his sister asked:

"Would you mind not going home till to-morrow? It's to-day now, you know, and I want to give a little dinner for you to-night."

"All right. Who'll be there?"

"You, Mrs. Ordway, Sonya, Miss Bradley, and Mr. Warren, if I can get them all. I want to show you off. And I think we owe it to them to make a little explanation —simply to say that you and I made a wager—"

"And both won it," laughed Laurie. "Fine. Would you mind asking Bangs and Epstein, too? They're my partners, you know," he added, with a boyish pride that amused her.

"Of course you must ask them. I want to be their 'nintimate friend.'"

"Where do we dine?"

"Why, let me see. Why not at the Colonial Club?

I am a non-resident member, but, naturally, I haven't gone there this year!"

Laurie whistled. "That will interest Epstein. I'm sure he has never been across its sacred threshold. Neither has Bangs. They'll want to put it into a play!"

"Perhaps I won't have enough left to feed them when I've paid you all I owe you. Think of it! But I don't have to give you your cart-loads of gold till we get home, thank Heaven! At eight, then, to-morrow night—no, to-night. And, oh, Laurie darling, I must kiss you a lot. I've simply *got* to!"

For a moment they held each other close. When Laurie spoke his voice was unsteady.

"There's no one like you, Bab," he said. "Don't think I don't realize what you've done for me. If ever I meet a girl with half your sense," he went on, more lightly, "I'll—by Jove! I'll marry her!"

Holding to the top button of his coat, Barbara leaned forward and kissed him again as he stood on the step below her. "Good night, best brother in the world!" she said, proudly.

"Good night, best sister."

For the first time, and for all time, the last of the Devons had found each other.

XXII

BARBARA GIVES A LITTLE DINNER

AT five minutes before eight o'clock on the evening of Barbara's dinner Simon Epstein's car, containing its owner and Mr. Rodney Bangs, impressively drew up at the guests' entrance of the Colonial Club.

Late that afternoon Epstein had telephoned to Bangs, suggesting, with an unnatural ease of manner, that he should call for his young partner, and Bangs had welcomed the proposal. He was intensely sharing the producer's interest in the prospect before them both.

This occasion, they realized, held something more than a dinner in a woman's club with a charming lady almost unknown to them. That new joy, alone, would not greatly have impressed Epstein, though he was glad to see the inside of the Colonial Club and to meet the lady. But he had met many ladies, most of whom were very charming indeed to the successful producer; and he was familiar with the good clubs of New York men, and was a member of one or two of them. It was the element of mystery in this affair that intrigued him. Though he was dining with Miss Barbara Smith, he had been told to ask for Miss Devon—a friend of hers, he assumed, who had put her up at the club; and young Jones had intimated that to-night his own apparent lack of a past was to be explained.

Bangs and Epstein were the first arrivals, and they were immediately ushered into a reception-room where Laurie was waiting for them. He greeted them with effusion, and, having made them comfortable in lounging-chairs, smiled at them with increased radiation.

Laurie looked, and indeed he felt, like a happy boy at a pantomime. Not since the days when he had hurled himself out of bed at dawn to examine his Christmas stocking had he known such thrills as those he experienced to-night. He reminded himself that they were justified, and that he must enjoy to the full an hour that comes to few men. He had found his life-work—and he had found it at a time when everybody who knew him was assuming that life and work were equally valueless to him. He had "made good" in his new field, and the job had not been easy. He was extravagantly proud of his sister, and extremely glad to bring her and his partners together in this dramatic fashion. He looked forward to the effect of the coming revelation to his guests as confidently as he had looked for the effect of big scenes in his plays. He had a sense of having "set" a big scene. And never in his life had he been so extraordinarily handsome. Bangs and Epstein glanced at him almost uneasily, reflecting that there was something positively uncanny in the fellow's good looks.

When Barbara entered, both men forgot Jones. She was as radiant as her brother, and the first look she turned on Laurie gave Epstein, he thought, the key to the evening's mystery. He was so sure of it that he nudged Bangs. This was The Girl.

But Bangs shook his head. He had seen Jones and his hostess together before; and if there was a Girl in Laurie's

life, which he doubted, he knew it was not Miss Smith. She was the only girl he had ever seen who was worthy of Jones. But one had only to look at the two to realize that they were merely the best kind of pals, intimate, sympathetic, and understanding. He stared at Barbara with eyes that blinked under the combined effect of her beauty and her charm. She was wearing the most stunning gown he had ever seen—a marvelous thing of white and gold; and with it, though he perceived this without understanding it, she was wearing a slightly imperious manner, softened by sympathy and happiness and a new understanding. In short, Miss Devon was back on her throne, and she showed it.

Sonya entered, calm but brilliant-eyed, in the one evening gown already familiar to her friends, and obviously ready for any surprise the evening held for her. Bangs and Epstein found the new guest very easy to talk to, though her eyes kept wandering from them to Barbara's face with an odd expression, half thoughtful, half curious. For once, at least, Miss Orleneff was puzzled, and was betraying the fact to every close observer of her thin and vivid face.

Mrs. Ordway and Miss Bradley drifted in, escorted by Warren, and dropping wraps and silken scarfs along their languid way. Louise Ordway, though less obviously bored than usual, seemed somewhat exhausted by the effort of being less than half an hour late; and Warren's expression, like that of Sonya, was not wholly natural. His coming, however, removed the last suggestion of stiffness from the group. He greeted Sonya, Bangs, and Epstein as old and tried friends, and spread blossoms on the pathway of their presentation to Miss Bradley and his sis-

ter. The incongruous little party fused with surprising ease.

At the table in the private room she had engaged, Barbara took her place, with Mrs. Ordway opposite her, and let her eyes slowly sweep around the smiling circle of her guests. She had wished to seat Warren at her right. But this, she felt, was Laurie's night, not hers, and Epstein was Laurie's friend and partner, as well as the oldest member of the party. With a subconscious pang, she placed Warren at her left, gave Mrs. Ordway Laurie on the right and Bangs on the left, and seated Sonya between Laurie and Warren. Flossie had congenial neighbors in Bangs and Epstein. That morning Miss Devon had enjoyed a prolonged and intimate conversation with the club's efficient *chef*. The result of this drew an early encomium from Epstein.

"Say, Miss Smith, you ladies got a cook in this club," he reverently observed as he drank his soup.

While Warren talked to Sonya, Barbara gave her whole attention to the producer, launching him into an impassioned monologue on Jones and the new play by a mere mention of the drama's title.

"The Man Above," he told her, would run at least a year in New York—probably longer; and after that it could be counted on to make a small fortune on the road, and in stock, not to mention moving pictures. He took its success lightly, intimating that picking winners was his specialty; but concerning Laurie he was more eloquent. For a few seconds she had a fear that she was taking the great little man at a disadvantage in allowing him to discuss his "partner" in continued ignorance of that youth's relationship to herself; but such suspicion could not

linger in the atmosphere of Epstein's artless enthusiasm. What Laurie's partner and play-producer said of him was what any proud father, suddenly determined to let himself go, might say of a successful son. And then, when she least looked for it, Epstein dropped into one of the unexpected confidences a casual encounter on the road of life sometimes holds for us. Notwithstanding the skepticism of Bangs, he was still half convinced that this was The Girl; and if it was, there were things she would be interested to know.

"Jones is a queer chap," said Epstein, slowly. "When he first come to New York, believe me, he looked like there was nothin' he hadn't tried. But he 'ain't drunk a drop since he's been here; an' I know that's so," he added, impressively. "As for women, that boy don't know they're on earth. Workin', eatin', sleepin', has been his life since I met him 'most a year ago—and there 'ain't been so much eatin' and sleepin', either. Now you know that ain't natural, with a looker like Jones is, and with most of the women in the company ready to fall for him. So I've tried to figger it out. It's like he's been in trainin' for a race, or somethin'—or," he added, significantly, "it's like he gave a promise to a girl to be a little snowball in New York. And if he did, believe me, he has kept it."

Miss Smith's smile, Epstein decided, was the most beautiful smile he had ever seen. He ceased speaking to give himself up to the full enjoyment of it. For half a minute she, too, was silent. The dinner, she reflected, was going very well. Every one seemed interested. Bangs was telling Miss Bradley such amazing things about the American drama that Miss Bradley was almost willing to await her turn to tell Bangs about one ambitious American

singer. Sonya and Mrs. Ordway were in cheerful disagreement as to the merits of a certain novel.

"You like Jones, don't you?" Barbara asked Epstein.

Epstein's lips parted. "Sure I do," he meant to say, with robust energy. But she was still smiling, and under the smile his cautious heart opened slowly, like an unoiled door. He was surprised to hear himself speaking abruptly, almost roughly. "I love him," he said. "I love that boy like he was my own son."

"Laurie has been very lucky," Barbara told him. "With his temperament, if he had fallen among men different from you and Mr. Bangs, he might have had a hard time. As it is, besides what you have done for him professionally, you have both helped him in ways you haven't dreamed of."

She left him flushing over that, and turned to Warren, to meet suddenly the deep, straight look of his blue eyes.

"You are glorious to-night," he whispered. "And—the time is up, you know!"

"Not till after dinner," he hedged.

"Yes, it is. Look straight at the situation. How long is it since we have met?"

"Two months, three weeks, and five days."

"Barbara! Then you have noticed—"

Miss Devon retreated as briskly as she had advanced. "That you left in the sulks and that your sister has been counting the days you have kept away? Of course I noticed it."

"I left because I couldn't help it. If I had stayed one minute more," continued Warren, calmly, "I would have seized you in my arms—"

"Hush! We can't talk here!" Barbara spoke dreamily.

She was surprisingly lost in the pleasant sensation of having him near her, of listening to his voice.

"Oh yes, we can! But now, of course, I've got to begin all over. I would have seized you in my arms," he repeated, firmly, "leaped upon the nearest steed, and galloped off with you to the purple hills, like a hero of romance."

"Wait. Please wait."

"I can't. I've waited too long already." He leaned closer. "Don't you realize that there is a limit to a man's endurance?"

"You don't look as if you had been enduring much. I see no hollow eyes from sleepless nights—"

"I sleep because I dream of you. I go to bed early to do it. That's what keeps the bloom of youth upon my cheek and gives you this false idea of my well-being. But I am the victim of gnawing pangs, just the same. I'm jealous of everything you do, of every one you look at. To-night, for example, I'm frightfully jealous of that splendid-looking chap, Jones!"

Barbara glanced at Laurie. "I love him," she said, simply.

"What! My God! Barbara, what are you saying?"

"Hush! You will have every one looking at us!"

"They ought to, but they won't. Tell me what you meant. You couldn't be so cruel—"

"I mean exactly what I say. I love him!"

At the expression in his eyes the mischief in her was consumed by a trembling flame. The tones of her voice deepened.

"We were babies together," she explained.

Warren drew a deep breath. "Oh, then, if it's only

friendship!" he exclaimed. "Barbara, you frightened me! Epstein has a notion that—well, never mind. Only he has been mysteriously nodding and blinking to-night, as if he knew something, and when you spoke as you did . . . you gave me a jolt," he went on, more naturally. "For weeks I have been counting the days to the first of October. Every morning I've told myself, 'It's one day nearer,' and every night I've said, 'One more day gone.' To-day I simply sat around counting the minutes; and the twenty minutes I had to wait for Louise and Flossie to-night were the longest I have ever known. You see, this is the night I ask you for—"

"My autobiography?" How wonderful it was to be listening to him, and how incredibly hard it was to answer him lightly!

"No! Hang your autobiography! Your promise to marry me!"

"Don't talk of that here."

"Say *Bob*."

"Mr. Epstein is looking at us."

"Wise old boy. He'll never have anything so good to look at till he sees you again."

"And Mrs. Ordway is looking."

"Good for her. Let's stop the dinner and tell her about our engagement."

"*Please* talk of something else!"

"If you will say, 'Please, dearest Bob,' I will consider the matter of changing the subject for a moment or two."

"I won't." She was saying it, at that very moment, deep in her heart.

"Then say you will marry me!"

She turned a candle-lit face away from him. "I won't say anything of the kind."

"Then let us effect a masterly compromise. Admit that you love me!"

The unconscious Epstein broke into this swift wooing. He desired to talk more to his hostess. He feared that he might never have another opportunity to do so, but in this guess the astute Epstein was wrong. He had innumerable opportunities at Devon House and in New York, in the years that followed.

"I been tellin' Jones," he said, after they had exchanged tributes to the gifts of Bangs, "it's time now to get off his chest what he's got on it. Ain't I right?"

Barbara assured him of her conviction that he could never be otherwise than right, and Epstein raised his voice in a willing effort to center upon himself the undivided attention of his fellow-guests.

"To-night Jones told me his friends got a little s'prise comin'," he announced. "All right. I say, let's have it now."

The moment was opportune. The dinner was nearly over, and the restraint exercised by hovering servants had been lifted by their departure. Coffee and liqueurs had been served, and Epstein was lighting a very large cigar whose abdominal band he had recognized with a sigh of pleasure. The smoke of Mrs. Ordway's cigarette was already drifting away in the rings she made so expertly. Every eye in the party, save Warren's, was on Laurie's face.

Laurie glanced at Barbara. She nodded, and her brother rose to his feet, welcomed by a pleasant friendliness of sound and movement, during which Bangs was inspired to

cry, "Author!" while Epstein banged the table with a heavy hand. For a moment the boy stood hesitating, not quite sure just how to begin, and wishing that he had given more thought to the form in which he would put his explanation to these cordial friends. Then, glancing again at his sister, he found his inspiration.

"It isn't much of a surprise," he began, "and perhaps I've made entirely too much of it. I feel rather foolish now, standing here, after stimulating your interest. But the occasion we are celebrating to-night is rather important to my sister and to me, and we have asked you to join us, partly to help us to celebrate, and partly because we owe you an explanation. I suppose I'd better mention, first of all, that our hostess is my sister, and that our name is not Smith or Jones, but Devon, and that we came from Devondale, Ohio."

To four of the hearers—Warren, Miss Bradley, Epstein, and Mrs. Ordway—the name meant all that it stood for. To Sonya and Bangs, whose lives were free of communion with society columns and the list of America's heiresses, it meant nothing; but no one spoke. Louise Ordway indolently kissed her finger-tips and waved them toward Barbara, who returned the salute as lightly as it was sent. Warren sat very still, one arm on the table, his head a little bent, his eyes on the cigar he held in his hand. Bangs wore his wide, admiring grin. He thought that Laurie was putting over his after-dinner speech in great shape.

"Barbara and I are supposed to be spending a year in Japan," resumed Laurie. "Instead of going there, after our heartfelt farewells to home and friends and the life we had always lived, we came to New York a year ago, under new names, and with no money, to see whether we could

each earn a living in a straight, rock-bottom contact with life. Perhaps it sounds fantastic to some of you, or even silly; so I'm going to explain that there was a big reason for it. My sister wants me to say it was the result of a wager between us. It was not. If I am to talk at all, I've got to talk frankly and intimately; I've got to say things one doesn't usually blurt out. So I'm going to admit that our coming to New York in the way we did was the last and greatest of a series of efforts my sister has made to—to—"—Laurie hesitated—"well, let's say to pluck me as a brand from the burning!"

He stopped. Barbara had flushed, and now she moved as if to interrupt him, but she obeyed his imperative motion and sank back in her chair.

"I was not worth much," Laurie went on. "I had crowded into life about as many blunders as any fellow could make in twenty-three years. I'm not worth much yet, so far as that goes. But—I've learned something. Also, I have put in a year of hard work, and it is the first hard work I have ever done. My sister knew by experience that I wouldn't do it unless some unusual pressure was applied—unless I was thrown absolutely on my own resources in a big city, under a new name. And she knew that even then, if I was all alone, I might not be able to—well, to throw off certain habits I had formed. So she offered to stand the gaff with me, and to make the same struggle I was making, under the same conditions. I suppose it was about the biggest sacrifice a girl ever made for a totally undeserving young pup."

He stopped again, but as he obviously had not finished, a tense silence still held among the guests. Epstein's oblique eyes seemed starting from his head. Warren had

grown slightly pale. Bangs's brown eyes looked red with excitement.

"The mere offer brought me to my senses," Laurie resumed, "and the experiment finished the work. I was mighty lucky in the men I met—Mr. Epstein here, our producer, and my chum Bangs, and Mr. Warren; but under any circumstances I believe I could have sat tight. When I wabbled, which I did often enough, I had only to think of my sister, struggling alone, friendless and untrained, against the conditions in this town. That steadied me every time. It put into me the thing I had never had—a backbone.

"For six months my sister addressed envelopes at a salary of eight dollars a week, and she lived on the money, up under the roof of an East Side lodging-house. She wasn't more than half fed. Fortunately, I didn't know that till last night, and I'm mighty glad I didn't. During the whole time, Miss Orleneff has been a tower of strength to her. Later, Mrs. Ordway and Miss Bradley gave her work to do, and they have both proved her good friends."

Louise Ordway blushed at this, suddenly and rather hotly.

"And now," Laurie ended, "the experiment is over. We have done our little stunt, and to-morrow we are going back home, to Devon House. We hope to see you there, all of you, very often; and we both thank you for what you have meant to us this year and for what you will always mean to us."

He sat down. Warren, perceiving that Epstein showed temperamental indications of being overcome by his emotions, and of desiring to make a speech, regardless of that handicap, quickly rose to his feet.

"No one has asked me to respond for this interested

group," he said, pleasantly. "I'm just doing it. But I'm sure I speak for every one when I say that we are all very much excited and full of congratulation, and that we want to ask a lot of questions and hear about everything in detail. So I propose that we adjourn to the loggia, where we can talk more freely."

His fellow-guests rose upon the words, and left the room in an informal group, amid sounds of an excitable nature, uttered by Mr. Epstein. Laurie led the way, with Barbara on one arm and Epstein clinging to the other, while Bangs shyly trotted beside them. Warren accompanied his sister and Miss Bradley, and remained with them, listening to their talk with Sonya, and saying little himself, but wearing an expression which Mrs. Ordway regarded with apprehensive eyes. Half an hour had passed before he reluctantly approached the corner where Barbara was talking to Bangs.

"So, Princess," he greeted her lightly, "you're going back to your kingdom!"

His tone and manner were so unexpected that her quiet glance changed to something like a stare.

"Yes," she said, "I'm going home."

"To-morrow?"

"That is what we have planned."

Bangs excused himself. He had the breeding which is firmly based on common sense, and something told him that these two had vital things to say. Barbara studied Warren, trying to find in this courteous stranger the man who had talked to her at the table only an hour ago. He took the chair Bangs had left, and for a long minute sat staring at the floor. Then he raised his eyes and met hers with his straight look.

"Barbara," he said, seriously, "the situation is rather difficult, but it must be faced. Twice I have asked you to marry me. No doubt you meant to give me my *congé* to-night. Well—"

With her puzzled eyes on his, it was hard to go on.

"I have my *congé*," he ended. "That is understood."

The puzzled look in Barbara's eyes changed to one of sudden comprehension. "I see," she said, slowly. "I am to understand that you are now asking me not to marry you. Is that it?"

His jaw set. "I—well, I realize that you won't marry me, and that I was a presumptuous chump to imagine that you would."

"But I intend to marry you," she murmured, sweetly.

"You—you intend—"

"Of course I do."

Warren almost groaned. "Barbara," he burst out, desperately, "listen to me! The truth is, I—I can't marry a girl who is—is—"

"Well?"

"To put it baldly, a girl I can't support."

"I can support myself," Miss Devon suavely reminded him.

"I know. That's just what I can't bear."

He moved his chair and sat facing her, with eyes steadily on hers.

"I'm going to confess something," he went on. "I've tried to keep reasonably free from prejudices and obsessions, but there's one thing I despise—and that's the man who lives on his wife's money. He is my pet abomination. He has always been that. I have discussed him in the abstract by the hour. It makes me hot to think of him."

His voice shook. "I can't play his rôle," he brought out, between his teeth.

"But—surely you have some sort of an income."

"Of course I have—enough to give my wife all the necessities and many of the comforts of life. But I couldn't support Barbara Devon six weeks on the scale she's used to; and I won't let her make any sacrifices for me. That," he added, "is the whole situation in a sentence."

Before a turn of fate as unexpected as this, Barbara felt slightly dazed, though even yet she could not take it seriously. She deliberately played with the happiness of which she felt so sure.

"So then," she said, "you put pride before love, like a hero of romance."

"I don't consider it pride," he told her, miserably. "I consider it self-respect. And I could not make you happy, if we married, because I should be utterly wretched myself."

"You wouldn't have to live on my money," Barbara explained, patiently. "Live on your own income. Let me live on mine."

"Hardly!"

All the softness had left Warren's face. Lines she had never seen before appeared about his mouth.

"I haven't a cent from my father's estate," he went on, steadily. "I turned it all over to Louise when I started out for myself. Now I have exactly what I earn in my profession. Last year it was about seven thousand dollars. So far, this year, it's about eight thousand. That might run Devon House a month," he ended, bitterly.

"We could live gloriously on eight thousand dollars," murmured Barbara. "I feel as if it would buy the uni-

verse. Aren't you forgetting that I have just lived a year on eight hundred? And six months on two hundred?"

Warren held himself in hand. "That was a stunt," he declared, stolidly. "You couldn't keep it up."

"I could. Indeed I could!"

He blinked. She was leaning toward him.

"Dear Bob," she murmured. "Please marry me!"

Warren's breath caught. "This is no time for joking," he brought out, somberly.

"I know it's not. That's why I am so serious." Her expression changed. "If there is anything I have got during this last year," she said, slowly, "it is a little common sense. Perhaps there's not much of it—but there's enough to make me refuse to go on with this foolish discussion. I'm going to marry you, Bob, and that's all there is to it."

"Barbara—darling; try to understand!"

"Do you love me?"

"Yes. My God! yes!"

"As much as ever?"

"More than ever. How can you doubt it?"

"Your coy reluctance at this crisis makes a maiden feel a little uncertain," the lady admitted. Then she rose. "It's settled," she said, coolly. "We won't talk about it any more, unless you decide to jilt me. Then I shall probably bestow my undesired affections on Mr. Epstein. In the mean time, I must remember that I have other guests."

The evening was over. Epstein and Bangs had departed, and Sonya and Barbara had gone through a lingering leave-taking, brightened by the fact that Sonya

was following her friend to Devon House the first of January.

"It will be your headquarters the year 'round," Barbara explained, "and you can write to your heart's content. Bob and I will live there only in the summers, though Bob doesn't know it yet; and he'll have to make week-end journeys. In the winters I shall live in New York with him, on his income. That's fair, don't you think?"

Sonya thought it was. "And I'm so happy over you," she added. "It's all so wonderful that I haven't really taken it in yet." They kissed again.

Mrs. Ordway's parting remark was characteristic. "Bob will bring you home," she said, "and I shall be waiting for a final powwow. Don't imagine I will tactfully disappear. This is my last night, and I'm going to make the most of it."

But she was better than her promise. Barbara and Warren found the big library deserted and a welcoming blaze in the fireplace. With an anticipatory sigh, they settled down before it to resume their interrupted argument.

Susanne appeared at the door. "Madame would like to see you in her sitting-room, Miss Smith," she said. "She will detain you ten minutes only, and she desires that Monsieur Warren shall wait till you return."

Barbara rose, silencing her lover's protest with a gesture. "I will be back as soon as I can," she promised.

She found Louise in a chair before another unnecessary fire, crouched a little forward, her hands outstretched toward the blaze. As her companion entered she shivered.

"I'm cold," she said.

"It's not a cold night," Barbara reminded her.

"I am always cold—when I'm not burning up!"

Barbara stood near the broad, leather-covered fender seat, and waited. She expected some comment on the evening's revelation, some recognition of her own identity, but none came. Louise Ordway had her own fashion of doing things.

"Sit down," she commanded, indicating the fender seat. As Barbara obeyed, largely from force of habit, and sat facing her, she asked, abruptly, "Has Bob been fussing about your money?"

The question was so unexpected and so direct that the girl was startled into answering it. "Yes," she admitted.

"I thought he would. It has been his obsession—that objection to marrying a girl with money. I've heard him harangue by the hour on that one subject. He is in earnest, too. Don't imagine that he isn't. And he is quite capable of making you and himself wretched—the dear idiot." The dear idiot's sister sat silent a moment, staring into the flames. "But it doesn't matter," she ended.

"It matters to me." Barbara spoke from the depths of a growing depression. Her confidence was leaving her. There was a point, she reflected, beyond which one really cannot go, in arguing with an obstinate gentleman who seems reluctant to marry one.

"You care, of course." Bob's sister was not asking a question; she was stating a fact.

"Of course," Barbara admitted, humbly.

"He needn't fuss," Louise announced, abruptly. "He will have all I've got." She raised her head and met Barbara's eyes. "He will have it soon," she added, with deep significance.

"I—don't understand."

"Is it possible that you haven't suspected—all this time?" Their eyes held. "No, I see you haven't." Her voice changed, and took on the familiar edge of her sardonic moments. "I got my death warrant a year ago," she added, casually. "That's what has been the matter with me. That's what has made me sleepless—knowing that there was absolutely no hope."

Barbara was on her knees beside her. "Why didn't you tell me?" she gasped. "Why didn't you let me help?"

"You did help. You were helping all the time, more than any one else could."

"But you are better."

"No, I'm not. I'm simply used to the idea, at last. At first it seemed that I never could be. It is such a strange experience," she went on, reflectively, but still with her detached air, "to be told suddenly, by the best doctors, that one must die. It is indescribable—and overpowering. Then, very gradually, the mind adjusts itself and a certain acceptance comes. That is the phase I have reached now. It makes me seem better."

"And you have been bearing this all alone?"

Louise nodded; for the first time she dropped the indifferent manner she had so obviously assumed. "It's easier to bear it alone," she muttered, almost fiercely. "The one thing I can't endure is pity. It would be the turn of the screw."

Barbara rose and walked back to the fire, where she stood for a moment gazing into its red heart. When she spoke her voice was as casual as the other woman's had been at the beginning of their interview.

"But you won't live here alone, will you?" she asked. "Come to us at Devon House. You can have an entire

wing to yourself, and dwell in splendid isolation if you like."

Louise shook her head. "I may come for visits," she said. "But I will live, and die, in my own house. It will soon be over. I have about six months more, they tell me; a year at the most. And—there's another thing." For the first time a trace of self-consciousness swept into her voice. "There's a great deal of pain—nerve-racking, abominable pain. That's why I've been—rather horrid." She rose. "We have solved your problem."

"For Heaven's sake, don't say that!" cried Barbara. "It's too horrible to think of!"

"It's going to make things easier for me—a lot easier," said Bob's sister. "It throws at least a gleam of light on a black road. And now go down-stairs," she commanded, "and talk to Bob. Don't say a word about this. I will tell him soon enough. I'm glad he will have you to help him through. Do you hear me?" she added. "I am glad!"

Barbara could not speak. As they stood facing each other Mrs. Ordway suddenly put both hands on the girl's shoulders and gripped them firmly.

"I wanted you to know to-night. I wanted to make such amends as I could, and I wanted you to—understand," she said, slowly. "You see, I have had my little mystery, too. Perhaps it will make you think of me more kindly. Good night."

"Let me stay."

"No. Tell Bob to come to lunch to-morrow. Go now. I'm tired."

Barbara raised her hands and clasped the cold hands that clung to her with such unconscious force.

"There's a great deal I want to say," she faltered.

The other laughed. "I know. But for Heaven's sake don't say it!" She bent and kissed the girl on each cheek. "Good night," she repeated, urgently.

Barbara slowly went down-stairs.

"Of course I can't resist you," Warren groaned an hour later. "No man could. But, Barbara, I'm afraid! I tell you that frankly, even in this hour, which is the biggest in my life. I'm afraid of myself and of my own nature, if I'm up against an intolerable situation. To live on you, or to let you give up most of what you're used to—that's my choice! Do you wonder that I find it hard?"

"I can't understand you," mused Barbara. "Money seems to me such a detail, such a simple, foolish trifle to fuss about. I suppose it is because my point of view has changed so much. I seem to have ended the year with a completely new set of theories about almost everything. Perhaps later on," she added, soberly, "they will make up to me for the discovery that when all is said and done I was a failure!"

"I like that!" Warren passionately protested.

"I was. I almost starved till your sister took me in. Suppose she had not liked me, or my music? My pulling through was sheer luck!"

"Nonsense! Let me tell you something." Warren was very serious. "You have found what you couldn't have got in any other way. It has been a wonderful experience for you, my dearest—a post-graduate course in life!"

"Perhaps. And at least it has held what I said I wanted —the unexpected," Barbara admitted. "My lack of success was unexpected, to me at least. That's one way to

look at it," she added, more cheerfully. "And it's wonderful to think of the things you and I are going to do with a lot of the money I don't need. I have always wanted to give more away, without knowing just how to do it. Sonya will know; she will help us. But oh, Bob! the best of all is—*you!*"

He caught her in his arms and held her close to him. "Does that mean that you love me?" he demanded. "You haven't really admitted it yet, you know. Does it mean that you do?"

"It means—everything," Barbara whispered, as their lips met.

THE END

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